AT THE BOTTOM

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AT THE BOTTOM

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BY

MAXIM GORKI

A New Translation
From The Russian

BY

WILLIAM L. LAURENCE

SAMUEL FRENCH
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TO LEO AND BARBARA BULGAKOV

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"At the Bottom" was first produced by Leo Bulgakov Theatre Associates, Inc., on January 9, 1930, at the Waldorf Theatre in New York City. The play was directed by Leo Bulgakov, the settings were designed by Walter Walden and the cast was as follows:

The Baron.....*Carroll Ashburn*
Kvashnya, a pie-peddler.....*Welba Lestina*
Bubnov, a capmaker.....*Victor Killian*
Andrei, a locksmith.....*John Wexley*
Nastya.....*Barbara Bulgakova*
Anna, wife of Andrei.....*Elsa Lazareff*
Satin.....*Richard Hale*
The Actor.....*E. J. Ballantine*
Michael Kostilyev, keeper of a flop-house.....*Ian Wolfe*
Vaska.....*Walter Abel*
Natasha, sister of Vasilisa.....*Anne Seymour*
Luka, a pilgrim.....*Edgar Stehli*
Alyoshka, a cobbler.....*Lewis Leverett*
Vasilisa, wife of Michael.....*Mary Morris*
Abramka, her uncle, a policeman.....*Louis John Latzer*
The Tatar.....*Ari Kutai*
The Grizzly.....*Trevor Bardett*
Several nameless lodgers, tramps, etc.....*Clara Balog, John Fallon, Jr., Evelyn Hill, Daisy Johnson, Mona Smith, Robert Parsons, Katharine White, Donald Willson, Lucille Forrest, Max Leavitt, Chas. Manville, Nicolas Sanin, Sasha Maruches.*

The action takes place in a large provincial town in Central Russia.

Act I
A flop-house, an early spring morning.

Act II
The same, late evening.

Act III
Courtyard of the flop-house, a few weeks later.

Act IV
The flop-house, a winter evening two months later.

ACT I

ACT I

SCENE: *A cellar, in appearance like a cave.*
The ceiling is low, with stone arches, black from smoke, and with the plaster crumbling away. The light for the spectator comes from above down, through a square window on the right wall. The right corner, partitioned off with thin boards serves as a private room for VASKA. *Near the door of this room are the wide boards used for a bunk by* BUBNOV. *In the left corner is a large Russian oven. At the left of the stone arch is a door to the kitchen, in which live* KVASHNYA, *the* BARON, *and* NASTYA. *By the wall, between the oven and the door, is a wide bed covered with dirty chintz bed-curtains. All around the walls are wide boards similar to those used as bunks in soldiers' barracks.*
In the foreground by the left wall is a block of wood with a hand-press and a small anvil attached to it, and another block, lower than the first. On the lower block, seated before the anvil, is ANDREI, *fitting keys strung together on wire rings; at his feet are a much battered tin samovar, a hammer, and files. In the centre of the flop-house is a large table, two benches, and a stool—all unpainted and dirty.*
Behind the table, near the samovar, KVASHNYA *is doing household work, the* BARON *is eating a piece of black bread, while* NASTYA, *seated on the stool, leaning with elbows on the table, is reading a tattered book. On the bed, hidden by the bed-curtains,* ANNA *can be*

heard coughing. BUBNOV, *seated on his board bunk, is trying on a pair of old, ripped-open pants on a hat-block, which he presses between his knees, figuring out how to cut the cloth. Near him is a torn-up hat-box, which he uses to make visors with; pieces of oil-cloth, buckram, and rags.* SATIN, *who just woke up, lies on his boards and groans. Unseen, on the oven, the* ACTOR, *is tossing around and coughing.*

The beginning of spring. Morning.

BARON. Yes, yes. Go on!

KVASHNYA. Nothing doing, says I, I wouldn't get married again for a million. No, sirree, says I, never again for me, not while I am conscious.

BUBNOV. [*To* SATIN.] What are *you* belly-aching about? [SATIN *keeps moaning.*]

KVASHNYA. Why should I, says I, a woman earning her own living, make a slave of myself for a man? Not me, says I, I am not crazy yet.

ANDREI. You are a liar!

KVASHNYA. Wha-a-t?

ANDREI. You heard me. You know damn well you're gonna marry that cop.

BARON. [*Snatches a book from* NASTYA'S *hand and reads the title.*] "Unrequited Love" . . . [*He laughs.*]

NASTYA. [*Reaching for the book.*] Stop your nonsense! Gimme that book!

[BARON *tantalizes her by waving the book high in the air.*]

KVASHNYA. You've got some nerve, calling me a liar. How dare you, you low down good for nothing, you—

BARON. [*Tapping* NASTYA *on the head with the book.*] Nastya, you are just a little idiot. . . .

NASTYA. [*Still reaching for her book.*] None of your business. Give it back to me.

ANDREI. Aren't we on the high horse! Well, countess, you're gonna marry the cop just the same—how do you like that?

KVASHNYA. You are a fine one to talk, you wife-beater, you. One of these days you'll beat her once too much—she's half dead already.

ANDREI. Shut up, you sow! It's none of your damned business!

KVASHNYA. Ho-ho! So the truth hurts, does it?

BARON. They are at it again. Nastya—where are you?

NASTYA. [*Without raising her head from her book.*] Go away, will you?

ANNA. [*Her head through the bed-curtains.*] For God's sake, stop brawling.

ANDREI. There she goes; squawking again.

ANNA. Day in day out, the same old dog-fight—can't you even let me die—in peace?

BUBNOV. Making a racket won't stop you from dying.

KVASHNYA. [*Walking up to* ANNA.] My dear, how did you ever manage to live with this brute?

ANNA. Leave me alone—

KVASHNYA. Oh, well. You've had a hell of a time, you poor thing. How is the pain in the chest?

BARON. Hey, Kvashnya, it's time we went for the groceries.

KVASHNYA. Wait a minute, can't you? [*To* ANNA.] Would you like me to get you some hot dumplings?

ANNA. No, thank you.

KVASHNYA. But you must eat. Hot food will make you feel better. I'll leave some for you in a pan and you can eat when you feel like it. [*To* BARON.] All right, duke, let's go. . . . [*To* ANDREI.] Ugh, you louse! [*She goes to the kitchen.*]

ANNA. [*In a fit of coughing.*] Lordy!

BARON. [*Gently slapping* NASTYA *on the nape of her neck.*] Throw that trash away, you little half-wit.

NASTYA. [*Muttering.*] Oh, stop it. What's that to you!

[*The* BARON *whistles and goes after* KVASHNYA.]

SATIN. I wonder who beat me up yesterday?

BUBNOV. Does it make any difference who?

SATIN. We'll suppose *somebody* did—but why did they?

BUBNOV. Were you playing cards?

SATIN. I was.

BUBNOV. That explains it.

SATIN. The bastards!

ACTOR. [*Protruding his head from the top of the oven.*] One of these days you'll wake up to find yourself dead.

SATIN. You are such a jackass!

ACTOR. Why so?

SATIN. Because you can't kill a man twice.

ACTOR. [*After a silence.*] I don't get you. What do you mean—twice?

ANDREI. [*To* ACTOR.] Say, you drag your carcass off that oven and get busy with the broom. Who do you think you are, anyway?

ACTOR. Oh, shut your trap!

ANDREI. You just wait till the missus gets here—she'll show you—

ACTOR. To hell with her! Today is the Baron's turn with the broom. Hey, Baron!

BARON. [*Coming from the kitchen.*] I am too busy to monkey with brooms. I have to go for the groceries with Kvashnya.

ACTOR. That doesn't mean a thing to me. You can go hang yourself for all I care. It's your turn with the broom and I am not going to do your dirty work.

BARON. Go to hell, then. My little Nastya here will sweep for me. Hey, there, unrequited love! Wake up! [*Takes her book away.*]

NASTYA. [*Jumping up.*] What do you want! Come on with that book, you pest! A Baron he calls himself!—

BARON. [*Giving her the book.*] Nastya, darling, sweep the floor for me like a good girl, will you?

NASTYA. You go chase yourself! What do you take me for? [*Goes to the kitchen.*]

KVASHNYA. [*From the kitchen door, to the* BARON.] Come along, you, they can get along very well without you here. Mr. Actor, you might as well do as you are told and not make such a fuss about it. Here's hoping you don't get a rupture.

ACTOR. I am always "it"—I wish I knew why.

BARON. [*Enters from the kitchen balancing on his shoulders a yoke from which are suspended baskets containing pots covered with cloths.*] They get heavier every day.

SATIN. It did you a lot of good to be born a Baron, eh what?

KVASHNYA. [*To* ACTOR.] Come on, get busy with the broom! [*Goes outside, letting the* BARON *pass first.*]

ACTOR. [*Climbing down from the oven.*] It's bad for me to inhale dust. [*Proudly.*] This organism of mine is simply poisoned with alcohol. [*Sinks down on a bunk and meditates.*]

SATIN. Organism—orgiasm—

ANNA. Andrei.

ANDREI. What do you want now?

ANNA. There are some dumplings there Kvashnya left for me. You better eat them.

ANDREI. [*Walks over to her.*] Aren't you gonna eat them?

ANNA. I don't want them—what good would eating do me? You are a worker—you—need food.

ANDREI. Are you afraid? Don't let it get you—maybe you still have a chance—

ANNA. Go on, eat—I don't feel well—it'll be all over, soon—

ANDREI. [*Walking away.*] Forget it. Maybe—you'll pull through. It happens sometimes— [*Goes to the kitchen.*]

ACTOR. [*Loudly, like one suddenly waking up.*] Yesterday in the hospital the doctor said to me: "Your organism," he said, "is thoroughly poisoned with alcohol. . . ."

SATIN. [*Smilingly.*] Orgiasm.

ACTOR. [*Persistently.*] Not orgiasm, but or-gan-i-i-sm!

SATIN. Trans-substantiation—

ACTOR. Oh, bosh! I am speaking to you in all seriousness. Yes, I am. If my organism is poisoned—that

means it's bad for me to sweep the floor—to inhale dust—

SATIN. Microcosm—macrocosm—ha-ha.

BUBNOV. What the hell are you mumbling there?

SATIN. Words—here is one more for you—transcendentalism—

BUBNOV. What's that?

SATIN. I don't know—I've forgotten.

BUBNOV. Why in hell say it, then?

SATIN. Just because—I am fed up, brother, with all human words—all our words, they bore me stiff! I've heard every damned one of them at least a thousand times—

ACTOR. In the play Hamlet there's a line "Words, words, words!" It's a good piece. I used to play the grave-digger—

ANDREI. [*Comes out of the kitchen.*] Better get busy playing with the broom!—

ACTOR. Mind your damn business. [*He strikes himself on the chest, assumes a pose and quotes.*] "The fair Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons be all my sins remember'd!"

[*Behind the scenes, somewhere from a distance, is heard a commotion, cries, then a police-whistle.* ANDREI *gets busy at his work-bench, screeching away with his file.*]

SATIN. I love unusual, meaningless words—when I was a boy I used to go to the library—I used to read a great many books—

BUBNOV. You don't say so!

SATIN.—Believe it or not! There are some very good books—and thousands of curious words. . . . I used to be an educated man. . . . Why don't you laugh?—

BUBNOV. You've told me so a hundred times. Who gives a damn what you was? Look at me—I used to be a furrier—had my own business—my hands used to be yellow from those damn dyes—you never saw such yellow hands—up to my damn elbows—I used to think they'd stay yellow till the day I croaked—that I'd go to my grave with hands all yellow—now look at them—they are just filthy, that's all—

SATIN. Well, what of it?

BUBNOV. That's all there is to it.

SATIN. What in hell are you trying to prove?

BUBNOV. It only goes to prove that no matter what colors you paint yourself with they are bound to fade in the end—

SATIN. Ah, you give me a pain.

ACTOR. [*Sits with his hands folding his knees.*] Education is the bunk. The main thing is talent. I used to know an actor who could barely read, but he was such an artist that he brought down the house every time he played.

SATIN. Hey, Bubnov, let me have five kopeks.

BUBNOV. I have just two lousy kopeks to my name.

ACTOR. I maintain that talent is all you need to play star parts. And talent is just confidence, belief in your own ability.

SATIN. You just let me have five kopeks and I'll believe that you are a star, a crocodile, or a chief of police—Andrei, let me have five kopeks.

ANDREI. You go to hell! And that goes for all of you—

SATIN. Don't get so snooty about it. You are a penniless bum yourself.

ANNA. Andrei—I am stifling—I can't breathe—

ANDREI. What can *I* do about it?

BUBNOV. Just open the door to the hall.

ANDREI. I will if you sit on the floor in my place and let *me* get up on the bunk. I have a cold as it is.

BUBNOV. [*Quietly.*] It's not up to me to open the door—it's *your* wife who is asking.

ANDREI. [*Sulky.*] I don't give a damn who is asking.

SATIN. My head is buzzing. Why in hell do people have to hit each other on the head?

BUBNOV. It's not only the head they clout you on, they don't give a damn where they hit you— [*Rises.*] Well, I have to go after thread—I wonder where in hell

our landlords are—don't wish them any hard luck but I hope they break a leg. [*Goes out.*]

[ANNA *coughs.* SATIN, *placing his hands under his head, lies motionless.*]

ACTOR. [*Looks about sadly, then walks over towards* ANNA.] How goes it? Bad?

ANNA. I'm stifling—

ACTOR. I'll take you to the hall if you want me to. Come on, I'll help you get up. [*He helps her rise, throws a nondescript bit of cloth over her shoulders and supports her on the way towards the hall.*] There, there—I know it's hard—I'm a sick man myself—poisoned with alcohol—

MICHAEL. [*In the doorway.*] Going for a little stroll, eh? Goody, goody. What a pretty pair—the prize stallion and his handsome mare—

ACTOR. Make way for two invalids, you!

MICHAEL. Don't let me stand in the way. . . . [*He hums some kind of a hymn, looks suspiciously about the room and inclines his head to the left, in an effort to hear what is going on in* VASKA'S *room.* ANDREI *busily clanks his keys and scrapes with his file, casting the while furtive glances at the landlord.*] You are pretty noisy!

ANDREI. Did you say something?

MICHAEL. I said you are making a lot of noise. . . . [*A pause.*] Let's see, what was it I wanted to ask you? [*In a quick whisper.*] Has my wife been around?

ANDREI. I haven't seen her.

MICHAEL. [*Moves cautiously toward* VASKA'S *room.*] You are taking up a lot of space for your two-roubles a month. Your bunk—your work-bench—I swear they take up five roubles-worth of room. I'll have to boost your rent fifty kopeks.

ANDREI. You think of nothing but more kopeks—I hope you croak— Why don't you put a rope around my neck and strangle me while you are about it?—

MICHAEL. Now, I ask you, what good would it do anybody to strangle you? What I say is: Live and let live. I'll boost you a half rouble on your rent, I'll buy with it some oil for the Lord's lamp—I'll burn it as an offering before the holy ikon, and all my sins will be burned away in it; and your sins, too. Since you don't give your own sins a thought somebody else has got to think about them for you—I tell you, Andrei, my boy, you are a bad man.—Your wife is nearly dead from your cruelty—nobody likes you, nobody respects you . . . and your work is squeaky, getting on everybody's nerves.

ANDREI. [*Shouts.*] What the hell are you trying to do? Stop pestering me. . . !

[SATIN *bellows.*]

MICHAEL. [*Startled.*] God almighty, has everybody gone bughouse?

ACTOR. [*Coming in.*] Well, I got Anna parked outside, all bundled up.

MICHAEL. That was very good of you, very good. That all goes to your credit—

ACTOR. Yeah? When?

MICHAEL. Bye and bye in the sky, brother . . . there all our acts are balanced up.

ACTOR. Suppose you pay me something on account right now?

MICHAEL. How do you expect *me* to do it?

ACTOR. Well, you can credit me for half of the money I owe you.

MICHAEL. He, he, he! You can think of the funniest things—kindness can't be paid for with money—it is a priceless thing. Only the Lord can pay you for it. Meantime you still owe me what you owe me—in full. You should be kind to *me,* too, an old man, without asking me to pay you for it.

ACTOR. You are a damn old gyp, that's what you are!

[*Goes to kitchen.* ANDREI *rises and goes to hallway.*]

MICHAEL. [*To* SATIN.] Mr. Squeak just beat it out of here. He, he. He doesn't like me.

SATIN. Do you know anyone, not counting the Devil, who does like you?

MICHAEL. [*Cackling.*] You are always looking for an argument. I, for one, like all of you, because I understand you—you are all my brothers, down on your luck, just drifting along— [*Suddenly, quickly.*] Is Vaska here?

SATIN. Go look for yourself.

MICHAEL. [*Goes to door and knocks.*] Vasya—

[ACTOR *appears at kitchen door munching something.*]

VASKA. Who is it?

MICHAEL. It's me, Vasya.

VASKA. What do you want?

MICHAEL. [*Moving away.*] Open the door.

SATIN. [*Without looking at* MICHAEL.] If his wife is in there we are going to have some fun—

[ACTOR *makes faces.*]

MICHAEL. [*Anxious, low.*] Who did you say was there?

SATIN. What's that? Are you talking to me?

MICHAEL. What was that you said?

SATIN. Nothing that concerns you—just talking to myself—

MICHAEL. Look here, brother, that will be about enough from you! [*Knocks loudly on door.*] Vasily!

VASKA. [*Opens.*] What the hell do you want?

MICHAEL. [*Snooping behind the door.*] I—I wanted to see you—

VASKA. Where is that money?

MICHAEL. There's something I have to tell you—

VASKA. I am asking you—did you bring that money?

MICHAEL. Wait a minute—what money are you talking about?

VASKA. You know damn well what I am talking about—the seven roubles for the watch I gave you—come across now—

MICHAEL. What watch? I don't get you at all—

VASKA. You don't, eh? See here, you gyp—yesterday, everyone here saw me sell you a watch for ten roubles. You paid me three, now cough up the other seven. Don't stand here gawking at me, you damn nuisance. All you do is snoop around and make life miserable for everybody. Come on now, I want my money!

MICHAEL. Come now, Vaska, no need of all this—you know very well the watch—was—was—

SATIN. [*Takes the words out of his mouth.*] Was stolen, ha!

MICHAEL. [*Haughtily.*] I don't deal in stolen goods—what do you take me for?

VASKA. [*Shakes him by the shoulders.*] Then what the hell did you disturb me for? What do you want?

MICHAEL. Nothing at all, nothing—I'll go away if you are gonna act that way—

VASKA. Go on, beat it—and don't come back without the seven roubles—

MICHAEL. Such nice, kind fellows—ai-ai. . . .

ACTOR. What a farce!

SATIN. That's great—I love it—

VASKA. What was that buzzard after?

SATIN. [*With a smile.*] Don't you understand? He was snooping around for his spouse.—Why didn't you knock him flat on his tail, Vasily?

VASKA. I wouldn't dirty my hands on such slime—

SATIN. You don't get my drift—one good punch on the jaw would finish him. Then—you could get hooked up with Vasilisa and become our landlord—

VASKA. Yeah? Swell idea! You'd not only wreck the place but you'd also take advantage of my good nature and booze away all I own. No, thanks! [*Sits on a bunk.*] The old bastard—woke me up just in the middle of such a nice dream. I was fishing somewhere and had just hooked, oh—, a tremendous trout—the kind of trout that you only catch in dreams. And there I was—playing him—all the time afraid he might get away from me—and I was just reeling him in—thinking to myself I'll have him in just another moment—

SATIN. That was no trout—that was Vasilisa—

ACTOR. He hooked *her* a long time ago.

VASKA. [*Angry.*] You can all go to hell—she with you—

ANDREI. [*Coming in from the hall.*] Christ, it's cold—

ACTOR. Why didn't you bring Anna back? She'll freeze to death. . . .

ANDREI. Natasha took her with her to the kitchen.

ACTOR. The old twirp will kick her out. . . .

ANDREI. [*Sits down at his work-bench.*] Well, Natasha will bring her back here then—

SATIN. Vasily, how about five kopeks?

ACTOR. [*To* SATIN.] Let us not talk of trifles.—Vasily! Let's have twenty kopeks.

VASKA. I'll have to work fast before you birds begin talking roubles. Here you are!

SATIN. Càtarrha! They don't make them any better than these ganefs.

ANDREI. [*Sullenly.*] They are generous with money because it comes so easy—they don't have to work for it—

SATIN. There are a lot of people who get their money easy but damn few who part with it easy— Work is a lot of bunk. If you can arrange to make work pleasant then maybe I'll work, too. Yes, maybe. When work is a pleasure life is worth living. When it is drudgery then you are no better than an animal. [*To* ACTOR.] Hey, you, Beelzebub, let's go to the gin-mill—

ACTOR. All right, Mephistopheles, let's go and get completely paralyzed! [*They go out.*]

VASKA. [*Yawning.*] Well, how's your old woman?

ANDREI. Looks like she ain't gonna last much longer.

[*A pause.*]

VASKA. I look at you and think that your scraping is all for nothing.

ANDREI. What else can I do?

VASKA. Do nothing.

ANDREI. And how will I eat?

VASKA. Human beings live, somehow.

ANDREI. You call them human beings? Scum of the earth, that is what they are! I wouldn't even spit on them—I am a worker—been working ever since I was a kid—Do you think I'm gonna stick in this lousy dump forever? I'll get away from here yet—I'll crawl outa here—I may have to rip my skin off doing it but I'll crawl out— Wait and see—as soon as the old woman is dead!

VASKA. That's a lot of bunk you are talking. You are worse off than anybody here—

ANDREI. I am a damn sight better— They live without honor or conscience.

VASKA. [*Indifferent.*] And what would they do with honor and conscience? You can't wear honor and conscience on your feet when you need shoes. Only the strong need honor and conscience. . . .

BUBNOV. [*Entering.*] Brrr. . . . I'm frozen stiff!

VASKA. Hey, Bubey, have you a conscience?

BUBNOV. Wha-a-at? A conscience?

VASKA. Yes, a conscience!

BUBNOV. What the hell would I be doing with a conscience? I am no capitalist.

VASKA. That's just what I say: Honor, conscience are for the rich only. But Andrei here is trying to tell me that we all have a conscience. . . .

BUBNOV. Is he trying to borrow one?

VASKA. Oh, no! He has plenty of his own.

BUBNOV. Oh, then he wants to sell it? Well, you won't find any customers around here. But I'll buy a deck of marked cards if you'll let me put it on tick.

VASKA. [*Condescendingly.*] You are a damn fool, Andrushka. *You* ask Satin what *he* thinks about a conscience—and then let the Baron tell you—, too—

ANDREI. I don't give a hang what they say.

VASKA. They are a damn sight wiser than you—even if they are drunks.

BUBNOV. Anyone who can be both drunk and wise gets double value out of life. . . .

VASKA. Satin says every man wants his neighbor to have a conscience, but that no man finds it convenient to have one for himself. And he is damn right. . . .

[NATASHA *comes in. Behind her comes* LUKA, *a stick in his hand, a bundle on his back, a kettle and teapot on his belt.*]

LUKA. Howdy, howdy, honest folks—a good day to you—

VASKA. [*Smoothing his mustache.*] Well, if here isn't Natasha!

BUBNOV. [*To* LUKA.] I was honest—until a year ago last Spring—

NATASHA. This is a new tenant—

LUKA. [*To* BUBNOV.] That's all the same to me, brother, I have respect even for thugs. Every single flea looks alike to me—they are all black and they all jump. . . . Well, my dear, where do I flop?

NATASHA. [*Points to kitchen door.*] Go in there, grandpa. . . .

LUKA. Thank ye, kindly, my good girl—any old place will do—any spot for an old fellow to keep warm is home for him—

VASKA. What a funny old bird you have brought here, Natasha.

NATASHA. He is a whole lot better than you are—Andrei, your wife is in the kitchen, you'd better come for her after a while—

ANDREI. All right—I'll come—

NATASHA. Try and be a little more kind to her—you know she isn't gonna be here much longer—

ANDREI. I know.

NATASHA. Yes, you know. It is not enough just to know. You should understand! It's awful—to die.

VASKA. I am not afraid of death.

NATASHA. Oh, you are a hero, aren't you?

BUBNOV. [*Whistling.*] Such lousy thread. . . .

VASKA. Believe it or not, I wouldn't mind dying this minute. Take a knife and stick it in my heart—I'd die without batting an eye—even with joy—from a pure hand like yours—

NATASHA. [*Going away.*] Oh, you make me tired.

BUBNOV. [*Drawling.*] These are the lousiest threads I ever saw.

NATASHA. [*At the kitchen door.*] Don't forget about your wife, Andrei.

ANDREI. All right.

VASKA. Great girl.

BUBNOV. *She'll* pass.

VASKA. I wonder what makes her so snooty to me. She refuses to have anything to do with me. If she doesn't get out of here she'll be ruined.

BUBNOV. It's you who will ruin her.

VASKA. Why me? I am sorry for her—

BUBNOV. Like a wolf for a lamb.

VASKA. You lie! I feel terribly sorry for her. Life is pretty damn tough on her here—I can see it.

ANDREI. Just wait, one of these days Vasilisa will catch you talking to her.

BUBNOV. And Vasilisa isn't the kind to let go anything she has her paw on. She's a tough customer!

VASKA. [*Stretches himself on the bunk.*] Both you prophets—you can go straight to hell—

ANDREI. You wait and see.

LUKA. [*From the kitchen, singing.*] "In the darkness of ni-i-ght . . . the way is ha-a-rd to find. . . ."

ANDREI. [*Going to hallway.*] Christ, this one yowls, too. . . .

VASKA. I feel blue. . . . Wonder what makes me feel this way. . . . You go on living—things go well for a time—then suddenly something inside you freezes and everything goes dreary—

BUBNOV. Dreary, hm.

VASKA. [*With a deep sigh.*] Hey! hey!

LUKA. [*Sings.*] "Ah-ah, I can't fi-ind the wa-ay. . . ."

VASKA. Grandpa, hey!

LUKA. [*Looks in from kitchen door.*] Was that for me?

VASKA. Yes, you. Stop singing!

LUKA. [*Coming in.*] Don't you like it?

VASKA. I like *singing*—

LUKA. Oh, you mean I am not much of a singer?

VASKA. You get me. . . .

LUKA. What do you think of that! Here I was thinking I could sing. That's always the way—a man goes along saying to himself: "I am doing well!"; bang! He gets it in the neck!

VASKA. [*Laughing.*] You've said something, grandpa!

BUBNOV. You tell me you feel dreary and here you are guffawing.

VASKA. What is that to you? Scarecrow . . .

LUKA. Who said he was feeling dreary?

VASKA. I did—

[*The* BARON *comes in.*]

LUKA. What do you think of that? Over there in the kitchen I find a girl reading a book and weeping. You should have seen her—buckets of tears. I say to her: 'What's the trouble, darling?' 'Oh, this is so sad!' says she. I ask her 'What is so sad?' 'It's all in the book!' says she. Now I ask you, is there any sense in anybody doing that? They do it only because they have nothing better to do—

BARON. That girl is a fool.

VASKA. Have you had tea, Baron.

BARON. Yes, yes. Go on!

VASKA. How would you like me to open a pint?

BARON. Yes, yes. Go on!

VASKA. I will if you go down on all fours and bark like a dog!

BARON. You ass! What's the matter with you, drunk or something?

VASKA. Go on—let me hear you bark. It will amuse me. You are a blue-blood, there was a time when you didn't consider the likes of us as human, so now—

BARON. Yes, yes. Go on!

VASKA. Well, now I am asking you to bark like a dog, and you are going to bark . . . you will, won't you?

BARON. All right, I will. You jackass, what satisfaction can you get out of it when I know myself that I have sunk almost lower than you? You should have asked me to go down on all fours when I was still above you.

BUBNOV. That's telling him.

LUKA. Good, I say, that's good!

BUBNOV. What's past is past. And what's left are just trifles. Here there is no high and low. We have shed everything, and all that's left is just our naked lives.

LUKA. In plain words, we are all equal. . . . Were you really a baron, brother?

BARON. That, too, of all things. Who are you? A spook?

LUKA. [*Laughing.*] I have seen counts, and I have seen dukes—but this is the first time that I have met a baron, even if he is a little mangy.

VASKA. [*Laughing.*] Baron, I blush for you.

BARON. It's time you knew better, Vasily.

LUKA. He-he-he! I keep looking at you, brothers. This life you are leading—oy-oy!

BUBNOV. What a life! As soon as the day begins the dog-fight begins.

BARON. There was a time when life was different. I used to wake up mornings, lie in bed and drink my coffee . . . coffee—with cream—believe it or not—

LUKA. But we are still human and you can't get away from that. No matter how much you pretend, or what kind of masks you wear, you are still what you always were. Man you were born and man you will die. It seems that the wiser people get the more things they find to do—and though they get a lot of wallops from life they always come back for more.

BARON. You, old fellow, who are you, anyway? Where did you blow in from?

LUKA. Who, me?

BARON. Are you a tramp?

LUKA. We are all of us tramps. I've even heard it said that the earth we live on is a tramp in the heavens.

BARON. That may be so. Well, do you have a passport?

LUKA. [*After a short pause.*] And who are you? Snoops—the bloodhound—

VASKA. [*Delighted.*] That's the stuff, grandpa, that's telling him! You got it right in the neck this time, Mr. Nobleman!

BUBNOV. Yep, it was as good as a punch in the nose.

BARON. [*Embarrassed.*] Oh, well, don't mind me, old fellow. I was only kidding. I haven't any papers myself.

BUBNOV. You are a liar!

BARON. Well, maybe I have some sort of papers, but they aren't worth a damn.

LUKA. No matter what kind of papers they are they are no good for anything—

VASKA. Come on, Baron, let's go to the gin-mill.

BARON. Oh, boy! Well, see you later, old fellow, you old scamp!

LUKA. Possibly I am one, my friend.

VASKA. [*In the hall door.*] Come on, get a move on you. [*Goes out. The* BARON *quickly follows him.*]

LUKA. All joking aside, was this fellow really a baron?

BUBNOV. Who knows who he is? He sure was some kind of a mockamock. Even now he'll be going along and suddenly the mockamock crops out. He can't quite manage to get over it.

LUKA. It's like small-pox. A man may get over it but it always leaves marks.

BUBNOV. He's all right, though. Once in a while he shows a streak, as he did about your passport.

ALYOSHKA. [*Comes in tipsy, an accordion in his hands. He whistles.*] Hey, menagerie! Hoopla—

BUBNOV. What are *you* celebrating?

ALYOSHKA. Shkuzhe me—forgive me—I didn't mean to be rude, honest!

BUBNOV. Drunk again?

ALYOSHKA. Why not? Just got myshelf kicked out of the polishe shtation. The captain he bootsh me out and he shaysh to me: "Alyoshka," shayzh he, "I don't want not even a shmell of you on the shtreet!" Can ye imagine it? I am a reshpectable fella, I am. That damn bossh keeps barking at me—what'sh a bossh, anyhow? He's all th' time full of hootch. I'm th' kind of fella that never wants nothin' from nobody. Don't need nothin', neither—so I quit. Try and hand me one rouble, or twenty roubles—you can't hand me nothin'.

[NASTYA *comes out of the kitchen.*] Try and hand me a million—'twon't mean nothin'. And to be told to shtay off the shtreet by dat drunk of a cop, a pal o' mine, dat means poshitively nothin' neither. I won't shtand for it nohow!

[NASTYA *stands in the doorway, shaking her head at* ALYOSHKA.]

LUKA. [*Good-naturedly.*] Well, my boy, you are not making much sense—

BUBNOV. As much as all humans do—

ALYOSHKA. [*Stretching himself out on the floor.*] Go on, eat me—it won't mean nothin' to me. I'm tough! Show me one tougher. I'm as tough as they come. This cop shayzh to me: I'll punch you in the jaw if I catch

you on the shtreet—sho I'm goin'—just for tha hell of it. I'll just plank myshelf in tha middle of tha shtreet—let them run over me, if they want— I don't want nothin' nohow!

NASTYA. Too bad—he's only a kid and he's already batting around. . . .

ALYOSHKA. [*Sees her and goes down on his knees before her.*] Mademozel—parlais-vous francais—promenade avec mooa—oo la la—I'm on a bat—

NASTYA. [*In a loud whisper.*] Vasilisa!

VASILISA. [*Quickly opens door. To* ALYOSHKA.] You here again?

ALYOSHKA. How d'ye do—come right in—

VASILISA. You young snipe, how many times do I have to tell you to stay out of here? You keep out of here, you get me?

ALYOSHKA. Vasilisa, dearest—I'm nuts about you—shall I play you a funeral march? Yes?

VASILISA. [*Shakes him by the shoulder.*] Git outa here!

ALYOSHKA. [*Moves towards door.*] Hold on . . . you can't throw me out like that. It's a brand new funeral march—just learned it—lively tune! Have a heart—you can't kick me out like that!

VASILISA. I'll show you if I can't—I'll get the whole street after you—you young whelp—I'll teach you to talk about me. . . .

ALYOSHKA. [*Running out.*] Guess I am not wanted around her—

VASILISA. [*To* BUBNOV.] I never want to see him in here again, do you hear?

BUBNOV. I am not your door-man.

VASILISA. Never mind what you are! Don't you forget I'm doing you a favor by letting you live here. How much do you owe me now?

BUBNOV. [*Calmly.*] Haven't figured it up yet. . . .

VASILISA. I'll figure it up for you, don't worry.

ALYOSHKA. [*Opens door and shouts.*] You can't scare me, Vasilisa! I ain't a-sca-ared of yo-u— [*He ducks out.* LUKA *laughs.*]

VASILISA. [*To* LUKA.] Who may you be?

LUKA. Who, me? Just a passer-by—a traveling man—

VASILISA. Here to stay or just for the night?

LUKA. That depends.

VASILISA. Your patchport!

LUKA. Maybe. . . .

VASILISA. Let's have it!

LUKA. I'll bring it to you—I tell you what, I'll drag it in to your bed-chamber—by it's whiskers—

VASILISA. A traveling man, he calls himself! If you said tramp it would be more like it.

LUKA. [*With a sigh.*] Ah, well, you are not very good to me, sister!

[VASILISA *walks towards door of* VASKA'S *room.* ALYOSHKA *pokes his head in from the kitchen door.*]

ALYOSHKA. [*In a whisper.*] Is she gone, huh?

VASILISA. [*Quickly turning towards him.*] You still here?

[ALYOSHKA *whistles and scoots away.* NASTYA *and* LUKA *laugh.*]

BUBNOV. [*To* VASILISA.] He is not there—

VASILISA. Who?

BUBNOV. Vaska.

VASILISA. Was anyone asking you?

BUBNOV. Well, I see you looking for him all over the place—

VASILISA. I'm looking after the house, you understand? Why hasn't the floor been swept? How many times do I have to tell you to keep the place clean?

BUBNOV. It's the actor's turn. . . .

VASILISA. I don't give a hang whose turn it is. If I draw a fine from the Health Department I'll kick out the whole damn lot of you—

BUBNOV. [*Calmly.*] And how are you gonna live?

VASILISA. None of your lip—I want the place spick and span— [*Goes towards kitchen. To* NASTYA.] What

are you loafing round for? Why is your face all puffed up? Don't be standing here like a dummy! Get busy and sweep the floor! Have you seen—Natasha? Was she here?

NASTYA. I don't know—I haven't seen her—

VASILISA. Bubnov, was my sister here?

BUBNOV. [*Pointing to* LUKA.] She brought *him* in here.

VASILISA. [*With a motion towards* VASKA'S *room.*] Was that one in at the time?

BUBNOV. Vasily? He was. Natasha talked just with Andrei—

VASILISA. Nobody is asking you who she talked with. The place looks like a pig-pen. You are nothing but a lot of swine. I want the place cleaned up, d'ye hear?

[*Walks out quickly.*]

BUBNOV. What a savage beast *she* is!

LUKA. The lady has a disposition!

NASTYA. You get like a beast leading this kind of a life—tie any human being to a husband like hers—

BUBNOV. Well, that tie doesn't bind her much—

LUKA. Does she always blow up like that?

BUBNOV. Always—you see, she was looking for her lover and he is not here.

LUKA. So, I suppose she got peeved and took it out on the rest of you. [*Sighs.*] Dear, dear, there are so

many people trying to order things, and they order other people around, bullying them—and still there is no order in life—and no cleanliness—

BUBNOV. They all want order but they haven't brains enough to know how to go about it— Just the same the place ought to be swept. Nastya, you'd better get busy—

NASTYA. Yeah? Who d'ye think I am, your servant? [*After a silence.*] I am going out to get myself good and drunk—I'll get stewed to the gills—

BUBNOV. Bright idea—

LUKA. Why do you want to get drunk for, my girl? A moment ago you were crying, now you say you are going to get drunk—

NASTYA. [*Determinedly.*] I'll get drunk—then I'll cry some more—that's that!—

BUBNOV. That's not much—

LUKA. But what's the reason, will you tell me? Not even a cockroach crawls without a reason—

[NASTYA *keeps silent, shaking her head.*]

LUKA. Dear me, dear me—human beings! What's to become of you? I'll sweep the place. Where is your broom?

BUBNOV. Over there, behind the door. [LUKA *goes to hall.*] Nastya, darling—

NASTYA. Yeah?

BUBNOV. What made Vasilisa jump on Alyoshka?

NASTYA. He told her Vaska was fed up with her and was gonna give her the air for Natasha— I am gonna get out of this place—find another joint to park in—

BUBNOV. Where? And why?

NASTYA. I am fed up with this joint—I am superfluous here—

BUBNOV. You are superfluous everywhere—all human beings on the face of the earth are—superfluous.

[NASTYA *shakes her head, rises and goes quietly into hall.* ABRAMKA *comes in.* LUKA *follows him with a broom.*]

ABRAMKA. Somehow I don't seem to know *you*—

LUKA. What about the others—know them all?

ABRAMKA. I'm supposed to know everyone on my beat. But I don't know you!

LUKA. That, uncle, is because somehow the world couldn't all get crowded into this beat of yours—a tiny bit of it had to be left behind— [*Goes into kitchen.*]

ABRAMKA. [*Walking over to* BUBNOV.] Maybe my beat isn't very large but it's the toughest one in the city. Only a few minutes ago, as I was going off duty, I had to run Alyoshka in. There he was, planked in the middle of the street, playing away on an accordion and hollering: "I don't want nothing from nobody!" Can you believe it? Right there in all the traffic! I had to pull him in to keep him from getting run over. He's a tough kid, always up to something—

BUBNOV. How about a game of checkers tonight?

ABRAMKA. All right. Er—how is Vaska?

BUBNOV. The same as usual.

ABRAMKA. Managing to get along, eh?

BUBNOV. Why shouldn't he get along? He can manage—

ABRAMKA. [*Dubious.*] He can, eh? [LUKA *passes to hall carrying a pail.*] M-m, I suppose so—. There is a lot of talk about Vaska—have you heard any?

BUBNOV. I hear all sorts of talk.

ABRAMKA. Any mention ever made of—Vasilisa?

BUBNOV. What about her?

ABRAMKA. Nothing in particular— Maybe you know and are just lying about it—everybody knows it, anyway— [*Sternly.*] You can't lie out of it—

BUBNOV. Why should I lie?

ABRAMKA. That's what I say. Ah, to hell with them, the dirty dogs! Telling everybody that Vaska and Vasilisa are living together—what's that to me? I'm not her father, just an uncle—why the hell kid *me* about it? [KVASHNYA *comes in.*] Everything seems to be a joke these days. [*To* KVASHNYA.] Why, look who's here!

KVASHNYA. Well, if here isn't my own love-sick soldier-boy! You know, Bubnov, he came up to me again

today, right at the market, asking me to get spliced. Ain't it killing?

BUBNOV. Hop to it—why not. He's got money and he still has lots of pep—

ABRAMKA. [*Proudly sticks out his chest and struts about.*] Still as good as new—ho-ho!

KVASHNYA. You old reprobate, you! Don't you ever pester me again. I been through it before, dearie. For a woman to get married is like jumping through a hole in the ice—you do it once and you never forget it—

ABRAMKA. Hold on there—there are all kinds of husbands—

KVASHNYA. They all look alike to me. When my dear husband kicked off, he had no sooner been dragged out, I spent the whole day all by myself, crazy with joy. I could hardly believe such a good bit of luck had come to me. . . .

ABRAMKA. If your husband treated you like a brute you should have complained to the police—

KVASHNYA. I complained to God for eight years—it didn't do no good—

ABRAMKA. You know, you can't beat your wife any more—there is a very strict law against it now—we have law and order all over—they don't allow you to beat people up any more—except to maintain order—

LUKA. [*Leading in* ANNA.] Well, here we are! The idea of a woman as sick as you are walking about all alone! Where is your bunk?

ANNA. [*Pointing it out.*] Thank you, granddaddy.

KVASHNYA. Here is one who got married—now look at her!

LUKA. The little woman is in very bad shape—there I find her crawling along in the hall, clinging to the wall and—moaning away. Why do you let her wander about all by herself?

KVASHNYA. A mere oversight on our part, please pardon us, grandpapa. Her private nurse, it seems, has gone out for a walk.

LUKA. Here you are—treating it all as a joke. It's no laughing matter. How can you do it? A human being, no matter who or what, still is worth something.

ABRAMKA. You ought to keep an eye on her. Suppose she should suddenly die? We may get into a mess—she should be looked after—

LUKA. That's right, sergeant—

ABRAMKA. M-m, yes, of course, though I'm not quite yet, hm, a sergeant—

LUKA. Never mind that. You look every inch an inspector—

[*A commotion is heard from the hallway, muffled cries and the sound of shuffling feet.*]

ABRAMKA. What's that—a brawl?

BUBNOV. Sounds like it.

KVASHNYA. Must go take a look.

ABRAMKA. Guess it's my duty to go, too. Duty, hell! Why should anyone butt in when people scrap? They'd tire themselves out and quit anyway. Let them maul each other all they want to—they wouldn't scrap so much if they got enough cracks on the jaw to last them a while—

BUBNOV. [*Climbing down from his bunk.*] Why don't you tell it to the Police Commissioner?

MICHAEL. [*Opens the door and shouts.*] Abram! Come, quick—Vasilisa is killing Natasha—come, quick!—

[KVASHNYA, ABRAMKA, *and* BUBNOV *rush into the hallway.* LUKA *looks after them, shaking his head.*]

ANNA. O God! Poor little Natasha!

LUKA. Who is fighting out there?

ANNA. Our landladies—sisters—

LUKA. [*Going over to* ANNA.] Why do they do it?

ANNA. Maybe because they are both fat—and healthy—

LUKA. And what is your name?

ANNA. Anna—I keep looking at you—you are just like my father—my dear daddy—so kind—so tender—

LUKA. [*Patting himself on the flank.*] I was paddled a lot—that's what made me tender— [*He laughs a quavering laughter. Spits on his hands and begins sweeping.*]

CURTAIN

ACT II

THE SUN IS RISING

(To be sung to the original melody)

I

The sun is rising and is setting
But my prison sees no light—
And the keepers stand on guard
Ah-ah, ah-ah, by my window day and night—

II

Guard all you want, it doesn't matter—
I will not run away, that's plain!
I long to get far, far away—
But ah, ah-ah, I can't break my heavy chain! . . .

III

Ah, you chains, you heavy chains,
Iron guards by night and day!
I can not break you, can not shake you,
Ah-ah, ah-ah, here I am and here I stay—

ACT II

SCENE: *The set is the same as in Act One. It is evening. On the bunks near the oven* SATIN, *the* BARON, GRIZZLY *and the* TATAR *are playing cards.* ANDREI *and the* ACTOR *are looking on.* BUBNOV, *on his bunk, is playing checkers with* ABRAMKA. LUKA *sits on a stool by* ANNA'S *bed. The cellar is lighted by two lamps—one hanging on the wall near the card-players, the other over* BUBNOV'S *bunk.*

TATAR. Just one more game—that's all—

BUBNOV. Come on, Grizzly, sing! [*He sings.*]

"The sun is rising and is setting . . . [GRIZZLY *joins in.*]

"But my prison sees no light . . .

TATAR. [*To* SATIN.] Shuffle the deck! That mean shuffle it, too! Me *on* to you—

BUBNOV *and* GRIZZLY. [*Together.*]

"And the keepers stand on guard
"Ah-ah, ah-ah, by my window day and night . . ."

ANNA. Beatings—slaps—nothing else—that's all I've ever got—slaps and beatings—

LUKA. There, there, little lady! Don't brood—

ABRAMKA. Where are you going? You can't move there—

BUBNOV. That's so—guess I can't—

TATAR. [*Threatening* SATIN *with his fist.*] You cheat, you put card up sleeve— Me see! You damn—

GRIZZLY. Forget it, Hassan! They'll gyp us anyway. What d'ye say, Bubnov?

ANNA. I don't remember one day when I had enough to eat—there wasn't a bite of bread I didn't drudge for —all my life I was in terror—tortured—always worrying with each bite that I'll never get another—all my life I had nothing but rags to wear—nothing but misery—what for?

LUKA. There, there, my child! Tired? Don't you mind—

ACTOR. [*To* GRIZZLY.] Play the jack—the jack, you bonehead!

BARON. And *I* play—the queen.

ANDREI. They always win.

SATIN. Yes, it's a habit with us.

ABRAMKA. A king.

BUBNOV. Me, too. *Now* then—

ANNA. I'll soon be dead—

ANDREI. Just look at that! [*To* TATAR.] Chuck this game, prince, chuck it, I tell you!—

ACTOR. That's right, butt right in—

BARON. Take care, Mr. Kill-joy, or I'll whale the tar out of you!

ACT II

"The sun is rising and is setting . . ." (p. 43)

TATAR. Come on, deal! Pitcher, it go to well and got bust—me, too!—

[ANDREI *shakes his head and walks over to* BUBNOV.]

ANNA. I keep thinking. Lordy, will I have to go through the same agony all over again in the next world, too? All over again?

LUKA. Nonsense! Of course, you won't! Lie quietly, get this nonsense out of our head! You are just gonna rest there! Endure just a wee bit longer! Every one of us, my child, suffers . . . each one of us suffers while he is still alive . . .

BUBNOV. [*Sings.*]
"Guard all you want, it doesn't matter . . .

GRIZZLY.
"I will not run away, that's plain . . .

BUBNOV *and* GRIZZLY. [*Together.*]
"I long to get far, far away—
"But ah, ah-ah, I can't break my heavy chain!"

TATAR. [*Shouting.*] Hell, that card come out of sleeve!

BARON. [*Confused.*] Well, what do you want me to do? Shove it up your snout?

ACTOR. [*With an air of conviction.*] Why, prince, you are mistaken—why, that's impossible, nobody here would ever do such a thing—

TATAR. Me see! Him crook! Me no play no more—

SATIN. [*Gathering up the cards.*] Let's get that straight,

old man! You know damn well that we are crooks! Then why in hell do you play with us?

BARON. He lost forty kopeks and he is making a noise as though he lost a bankroll—a prince, he calls himself—

TATAR. [*Heatedly.*] You should play honest!

SATIN. What for?

TATAR. What you mean what for?

SATIN. Just that—what for?

TATAR. You don't know?

SATIN. [*Imitating* TATAR.] I don't know! Do you?

[TATAR *spits, furious. They all give him the ha-ha.*]

GRIZZLY. [*Good-naturedly.*] You are a queer duck, Hassan! Now—get this! If they should start living honest, in three days they'd all die of starvation—

TATAR. Me no care! Man must be honest!

GRIZZLY. You got your trimming, now let's go have tea— [*To* BUBNOV.] Bubey— [*He sings.*]

"Ah, you chains, you heavy chains—

BUBNOV.

"Iron guards by night and day—

GRIZZLY. Let's go, Hassanka! [*Goes out, singing.*]

"I cannot break you, cannot shake you . . .
Ah-ah, ah-ah! Here I am and here I stay—"

[*The* TATAR *shakes his fist at the* BARON *and follows the others.*]

SATIN. [*To the* BARON, *laughing.*] Well, your highness, you were caught again with your pants down. For an educated fellow you are a complete flop when it comes to palm a card—

BARON. [*Throwing up his hands.*] Christ knows how it happened.

ACTOR. You have no talent—no faith in yourself—and without that you'll never get anywhere—

ABRAMKA. You have two kings to my one—ah, well—

BUBNOV. Even one would not be bad if he has any sense—move!

ANDREI. You lose, Abram—

ABRAMKA. That's none of your business—understand? Keep quiet . . .

SATIN. Anyway, I rooked him—took away fifty-three kopeks—

ACTOR. Give me three—come to think of it, what'll I do with them when I get them?

LUKA. [*Coming out of the kitchen.*] The tatar got trimmed all right. Are you going to gargle vodka?

BARON. Come along with us.

SATIN. Let's see what you are like, pickled.

LUKA. No better than when I'm sober . . .

ACTOR. Come along, grandpa—I'll recite poetry for you . . .

LUKA. *What's* that?

ACTOR. Verses . . . D'you get me?

LUKA. Ve-erses? And what do I want with *verses?*

ACTOR. They make you laugh—and sometimes they make you cry—

SATIN. Well, versifier, are you coming? [*Goes out with* BARON.]

ACTOR. I'm coming—I'll catch up with you—here, grandpa, for example, is a beautiful poem— [*Thinks for a while.*] I forget how it begins—I forgot— [*He wipes his brow.*]

BUBNOV. I've got you now! Your king is a gonner! Move—

ABRAMKA. I didn't move there—did you sneak something over?

ACTOR. Before, when my organism was not poisoned with alcohol, I used to have a good memory, grandpa —and now—it's all over, brother—everything is all over for me— I always used to recite those verses with tremendous success—thunderous applause—you—you don't know what applause means—it is—it is just like vodka, brother—I would step out front—stand like this — [*Strikes a pose.*] I'd stand—and— [*He becomes silent.*] Now I don't remember a thing—not a word—can't even remember my favorite poem . . . isn't it awful, grandpa?

LUKA. Yes, what is there left once you forget what you loved? What you love is your very life.

ACTOR. I've drunk my life away, grandpa . . . I am lost, brother. . . . And why am I lost? No faith in myself, that's why. . . . I'm done—

LUKA. How so, done? You—can get cured! They cure drunks these days, do you know it? They cure you, brother, and it don't cost you a kopek—they've built some sort of a hospital for drunks—and do you know? They cure them for nothing—they've come to find out, you see, that even drunks are human, and they are very pleased even when they want to be cured! Well, then, here you are, get busy!—Pull yourself together—get a move on!

ACTOR. [*Musingly.*] Where to? Where is it?

LUKA. It is—in a town named—what-you-may-call-it —it has a funny name—but I'll think of it bye and bye— Now I tell you what you do—you get yourself ready—straighten up! Take yourself in hand, even if it hurts— And then—you'll get well . . . and you'll begin life over again— Not bad, what? All over again — All right then—giddeup—

ACTOR. [*Smiling.*] Over again . . . from the beginning. . . . Good. . . . All right . . . [*Laughing.*] A-all—ri-ght! I can do it! I *can* do it, can't I?

LUKA. And why not? A man—can do anything—s'long as he—giddeups—

ACTOR. [*Suddenly, like one waking up.*] You are a

queer duck—! See you later! [*Whistles.*] So long, old man—toodle-oo— [*Goes out.*]

ANNA. Granny!

LUKA. What, my child?

ANNA. Talk to me.

LUKA. [*Walks over to her.*] All right, let's gab—[ANDREI *looks around, silently walks over to his wife, looks at her and makes some gestures with his hands as though he was trying to say something.*] What is it, brother?

ANDREI. [*With a small voice.*] Nothing . . . [*He walks slowly to the hall door, stands there a few seconds and goes out.*]

LUKA. [*Looks after him.*] Your old man is all cut-up.

ANNA. I am not thinking about *him.*

LUKA. He—beat you?

ANNA. That's not the half of it. It's he who brought me to *this*—

BUBNOV. My wife had a lover—he was a shark at checkers, the rascal—

ABRAMKA. Um-huh.

ANNA. Granny—dear—talk to me—I feel so tired—

LUKA. That's nothing—you feel like that just before you die, my child. It's nothing, my dear. Take heart . . . it's like this—you will die, and then you will have peace—you won't be in *need* of anything, and you will

have nothing more to be afraid of! It'll be so quiet and you will just rest— [ANNA *begins to rise.*] Lie down and I'll tell you— Death lulls all things—it is kind and tender—"Die here—rest there," as they say. That's true, my dear! Because where is there a place here for a man to rest?

[VASKA *comes in, tipsy, dishevelled, and sullen. He sits down on the bunk near the door and remains silent and motionless.*]

ANNA. And how is it—there? Won't there be suffering there, too?

LUKA. None at all there! None! Just believe that. There'll be rest—and nothing else. They will bring you before God and they will say: "Look who is here, God, here comes your servant, little Anna!"

ABRAMKA. [*Severely.*] And how do you know what they are gonna say there? Oh, you are—

LUKA. It must be that I *do* know, Mr. Sergeant.

ABRAMKA. [*Conciliatory.*] Well, all right—have it your way—though I am—er—not quite yet—ahem-a sergeant—

BUBNOV. I jump two.

ABRAMKA. Hell! May you—

LUKA. And God will look at you kindly—tenderly and will say: "I know this Anna!" "Well," he'll say, "take her, this Anna, into Paradise! Let her rest up. . . . I know her life on earth was very hard . . . she is all tired out . . . let Anna have rest. . . ."

ANNA. [*Stifling.*] Granny—dear one—if it could only be—if I could only rest—not feel anything more—

LUKA. You won't—there'll be no more feeling at all—believe that! Die with joy, without fear. Death, I tell you, it is to us like a mother to little children—

ANNA. Maybe—maybe—I can still get well?

LUKA. [*With a laugh.*] What for? Just to suffer again?

ANNA. Well—I might live just a little bit more—just a little bit— Since there will be no suffering *there* I could bear a little more *here*—I could!

LUKA. There'll be nothing there—only—

VASKA. [*Rising.*] That's so—maybe; and again—maybe it ain't so—

ANNA. [*Frightened.*] Lordy—

LUKA. Say you, handsome—

ABRAMKA. Who's making all this noise?

VASKA. I am! How d'ye like that?

ABRAMKA. You have a mean tongue, that's what! You ought to know better—

VASKA. Ah, g'way, you bonehead! And I may yet have that for an uncle! Ho-ho!

LUKA. [*In an undertone to* VASKA.] See here, not so loud—this woman here is dying—her lips are already touched by the earth—let her be—

VASKA. All right, grandpa, anything you say. I take

my hat off to you, you are all right. You are a damn good liar . . . you make up such cheerful yarns!—Never mind, keep lying—there's very little joy in life as it is, brother.

BUBNOV. Is that right? Is she really dying?

LUKA. I didn't say it to be funny.

BUBNOV. That means there'll be no more coughing—her coughing got on the nerves— I jump two!

ABRAMKA. Oh, you dirty dog!

VASKA. Abram!

ABRAMKA. I'm not Abram to you—

VASKA. Abie! Is Natasha—laid up?

ABRAMKA. What's that to you?

VASKA. Come on, tell me—did Vasilisa give her a bad beating?

ABRAMKA. That's none of your business, either! It's a family affair—who d'ye think you are, anyway?

VASKA. Never mind who I am . . . If I want to you'll never see Natashka again!

ABRAMKA. [*Quitting the game.*] What's that you say? Who d'ye mean? You dare talk about my niece? You, thief!

VASKA. One thief *you* never caught!

ABRAMKA. You just wait—I'll catch you—damn soon, too!

VASKA. And if you do your whole damn tribe will be out of luck, too. D'ye think I'll be the goat for all of you? Every whelp has his yelp. They'll ask me: "Who made you steal and showed you where?" "Micky Kostilyev and his wife!" "And who was your fence?" "Micky Kostilyev and his wife!"

ABRAMKA. You lie! They won't believe you.

VASKA. They'll believe me because—it's true. And I'll get you in it, too—ha! I'll ruin the whole lot of you, bastards, just watch!

ABRAMKA. [*Losing ground.*] You lie! And—you lie! And—what harm have I ever done to you? You mad dog—

VASKA. And what good have you ever done me?

LUKA. Tha-at's it—

ABRAMKA. You—what th' hell are you croaking for? You keep outa this! It's a family affair—

BUBNOV. [*To* LUKA.] Forget it! It's not our necks they are tying a noose for—

LUKA. [*Serenely.*] But really I haven't done anything. I am only saying that not doing harm to anybody is nothing to brag about!—

ABRAMKA. [*Unable to grasp it.*] Look here, all of us here know each other—but you—who the hell are you?

[*He snorts angrily and quickly walks out.*]

LUKA. The lady-killer got peevish. . . . Oho-ho, I see, brothers, things around here are a little mixed up.

VASKA. He ran to complain to Vasilisa.

BUBNOV. You are only kidding yourself, Vasily. What's the idea of putting up this bold front, all of a sudden? A bold front is all right enough in its place, when you are out in the woods—picking mushrooms. Here it's not worth a hurrah. They'll have your neck in a sling before you know it!

VASKA. Just let them try. You don't catch us boys from my part of the country taking a nap. If they want to fight we'll give 'em all the fight they want.

LUKA. It would be a good thing for you, my boy, if you pulled out of here—

VASKA. Where to? Tell me that!

LUKA. You can go to—Siberia.

VASKA. Oh, no! If I ever go to Siberia it'll be at government expense.

LUKA. You listen to me—go. You'll find your place there. They need such as you over there.

VASKA. My place was fixed for me. My old man spent all his life in jail and he ordered me, too, to follow him. Even when I was a kid they already called me a thief, son of a thief.

LUKA. A great land—Siberia! A golden land! For anyone with health and brains it would be like a hot-bed to a cucumber.

VASKA. Say, old fellow! Why do you always lie?

LUKA. Eh?

VASKA. Now he's getting deaf. I say, why do you lie?

LUKA. In what am I lying?

VASKA. In everything. You say: "It's good there, it's good here"—you know you lie! Why do you?

LUKA. You just believe me—go there, look for yourself . . . you'll say: "Thank you!" to me for having told you. Why do you waste yourself here? And—what's biting you that you want the truth so badly? Just think! The truth may mean a broken neck for you—

VASKA. That's nothing to me. If it's broken—let it be broken—

LUKA. You lunatic! Do you want to die?

BUBNOV. What's all this bunk you two are passing around? Makes no sense to me. What is this truth you want, Vaska? And what for? You know the truth about yourself—everybody knows that—

VASKA. Wait a minute, hold your horses! I want him to tell me. Listen, old fellow: Is there a God?

[LUKA, *silent, smiles.*]

BUBNOV. Ah, men just live on—like shavings on a river they drift on—a house is built—and the shavings—out. . . .

VASKA. Well? Is there? Speak up—

LUKA. [*In a low voice.*] If you believe, there is; if you don't believe, there ain't . . . anything you believe in—is's.

[VASKA, *silent, stands staring at the old man in utter astonishment.*]

BUBNOV. Little me is going out for tea . . . shall we hop over to the saloon, eh?

LUKA. [*To* VASKA.] What are you staring at?

VASKA. Nothing—see here—are you telling me—

BUBNOV. Well, guess I'll have to go all by myself— [*He goes to the door and runs into* VASILISA.]

VASKA. Does that mean that you—

VASILISA. [*To* BUBNOV.] Is Natasha here?

BUBNOV. No! [*He goes out.*]

VASKA. Ah, she is back again!

VASILISA. [*Goes over to* ANNA.] She still alive?

LUKA. Don't disturb her. . . .

VASILISA. And you? What are you sticking around for?

LUKA. I can go away . . . if necessary—

VASILISA. [*Heads towards door in* VASKA'S *room.*] Vasily, I want to talk to you.

[LUKA *goes to hall door, opens it then shuts it with a bang. He then slyly climbs to a bunk and from there to the top of the oven. From* VASKA'S *room.*] Vasya, come over here!

VASKA. I won't— I don't want to—

VASILISA. What's the matter? What are you grousing about?

VASKA. I am bored— I am fed up with all this mess—

VASILISA. Fed up—with me, too?

VASKA. You, too. . . . [VASILISA *tightly draws her shawl about her shoulders, pressing her hands to her breast. She goes to* ANNA'S *bed, peeps cautiously behind the curtains, then returns to* VASKA.] Well, say it!

VASILISA. What is there to say? I can't force you to love me—and I am not the kind to ask for favors—thanks for telling me—the truth.

VASKA. What truth?

VASILISA. That you are sick of me—or isn't it the truth? [VASKA *looks at her silently.* VASILISA *moves towards him.*] What are you staring at? Don't you recognize me?

VASKA. [*With a sigh.*] You are beautiful, Vasilisa! [*She puts her arm around his neck but he shakes her off with a movement of his shoulder.*] Yet you never hit the right spot in my heart—and I lived with you, 'n everything—but I never really liked you—

VASILISA. [*Quietly.*] So that's it—we-ell?—

VASKA. Well, so there is nothing for us to talk about! Nothing . . . go away from me—

VASILISA. Sweet on someone else?

VASKA. That's none of your business. If I've fallen for someone else I'm not gonna ask you about it—

VASILISA. [*Significantly.*] That's no way to talk—maybe I could fix it up for you—

VASKA. [*Suspiciously.*] Fix it up with whom?

VASILISA. You know—why beat about the bush? Vasily—I am—on the level— [*Lower.*] I'll admit it—you've hurt me—it is like a kick in the face—you told me you loved me—and all of a sudden—

VASKA. All of a sudden nothing— It's a long time since I— Damn it, there is no heart in you, girl—a woman—should have a heart—we men are beasts—we must have—we must be—trained—and you—what have you trained me to?

VASILISA. Let bygones be bygones . . . I know, a man can't help himself in such things. . . . You don't love me any more—all right—there's nothing to be done about it—

VASKA. Well, then, that means we are quits. We part quietly, without no brawls or nothing—that's the way it ought to be—

VASILISA. Not yet, wait! After all—when I was living with you I always kept hoping that you will help me drag myself out of this hole—help me get away from that husband, that uncle—from all this life—and maybe I didn't really love you but this hope of mine, this thought, that I loved in you—do you understand? I was waiting for you to pull me out—

VASKA. You are no cork, and I am no cork-screw— I've often thought to myself that anybody with brains like yours—for you do have brains—you are damn smart—

VASILISA. [*Leaning close to him.*] Vasya—come—let's help each other—

VASKA. How?

VASILISA. [*Quiet, forceful.*] My sister—you like her—I know—

VASKA. And that's why you beat hell out of her— Look out, Vasilisa! Don't dare touch her again—

VASILISA. Hold on, there! Don't get excited! We can fix things up quietly so that we'll all be satisfied—do you want to marry her? I'll even give you money—three hundred roubles—if I collect more—I'll give you more—

VASKA. [*Stepping back.*] Hold on! What's the game? What do I have to do?

VASILISA. Free me—from my husband—take that noose off my neck—

VASKA. [*With a soft whistle.*] So that's the game! Oho-ho! You've planned it all out God damn well—hubby, pushing daisies; lover, making little ones out of big ones; and you yourself—

VASILISA. You won't need to do time, Vasya! Don't do it yourself—get some of your pals—and if you do, who'll ever know it—just think—Natasha—you'll have money—you'll go away somewhere—together—you'll free me forever—and it'll be good for my sister, too, not to be near me. I just can't bear to look at her—I get furious with her because of you—and I just can't help myself—I torture the kid—I beat the life outa her—I

beat her so much that I myself weep out of pity for her— Ah, how I beat her! And I'll keep on beating her—!

VASKA. That's right, crow about it, you beast!

VASILISA. I'm not bragging. I'm just telling you how it is. Think, Vaska, you've been locked up twice—because of this husband of mine—just through his meanness— He keeps clinging to me like a bed-bug—he's been sucking my blood for four years— And what sort of *husband* is he to me? Natashka he just tortures —always nags her, keeps calling her—beggar . . . and for everyone around he is just—plain poison.

VASKA. You are a sly devil, you are.

VASILISA. My words are clear enough . . . you have to be pretty stupid not to know what I am driving at—

[MICHAEL *enters cautiously and sneaks up front.*]

VASKA. [*To* VASILISA.] Go on, beat it!

VASILISA. Think it over. [*Sees her husband.*] What do you want? Following me, are you?

[VASKA *jumps up and stares savagely at* MICHAEL.]

MICHAEL. That's me, just me! You two here—alone? Ah-ha. . . . Just having a little talk, eh? [*He suddenly stamps his feet and yells.*] Vasilisa, you slut, you low-down bitch! [*Gets frightened of his own yelling, met with silence and motionlessness.*] Lord, forgive me . . . Vasilisa, you've again led me to sin— I've been looking for you everywhere— [*Shrieking.*]

It's time to go to bed! You forgot to fill the ikon-lamp —ah, you! Low down swine. . . . [*He shakes at her his trembling fist.* VASILISA *slowly walks to the hall door, glancing at* VASKA *as she does so.*]

VASKA. [*To* MICHAEL.] Hey, you! Outside! Get the hell out!

MICHAEL. [*Shrieking.*] I am the boss here! Get the hell out yourself, you thief!

VASKA. [*Darkly.*] Beat it, Mishka—

MICHAEL. Don't you dare—I'll—I'll—

[VASKA *grabs him by the collar and shakes him. From the top of the oven someone lets loose a terrific snore, followed by an ungodly yawn.* VASKA *lets go.* MICHAEL *runs out, screaming, into the hall.*]

VASKA. [*Jumping on a bunk.*] Who's that? Who's there on the oven?

LUKA. Eh?

VASKA. So it's you?

LUKA. [*Calmly.*] Yes, it's I—I, myself— Oh, dear God in Heaven—

VASKA. [*Closes hall door, looks for the wooden bolt but cannot find it.*] Oh, hell—hey, grandpa, come down here!

LUKA. All ri-ight—I'm coming—

VASKA. [*Gruffly.*] Why did you crawl up the oven?

LUKA. And where else might I be?

VASKA. Didn't I see you go to the hall?

LUKA. For an old fellow like me, brother, the hall is pretty chilly—

VASKA. Did you—hear us?

LUKA. Hear? Of course, I heard! How could I help hearing? Am I deaf or something? Ah, my boy, you are lucky—that's real lucky for you!

VASKA. [*Suspiciously.*] How, lucky? Lucky in what?

LUKA. Just in that, that I got on top of the oven.

VASKA. And—what was the idea of the racket you were making?

LUKA. Well, because, that is to say—I was getting pretty hot up there . . . that's where you were in luck, boy—and then again, maybe I had an idea the young man may make a mistake—may do a little unnecessary strangling—

VASKA. Ye-es—I could have done it— I hate the bastard—

LUKA. It's hard not to make mistakes . . . there's nothing harder— Everybody often makes mistakes—

VASKA. [*Smiling.*] Come on, grandpa, don't tell me you ever made a mistake like that?

LUKA. Listen, boy! I'm gonna tell you something: This woman—get away from her! You just—forget her! Don't let her come within a mile of you! As for her husband—she herself will give him his ticket to the next world—and she'll get away with it much better

than you ever could, believe me! Don't listen to the witch . . . look at me . . . a bald-head. Because of all these different women. . . . I knew more wenches than I had hair on my head—but this wench here is worse than poison—

VASKA. I don't know whether to thank you or—maybe strangle you—too—

LUKA. You—better not say anything! You can't make it better than what I said. Listen—this girl you like, take her by the hand and beat it outa here—scoot it off with her—as far as you can scoot—

VASKA. [*Gloomily.*] I can't make people out—I can't tell which are good, which bad . . . I can't tell a damn thing. . . .

LUKA. What is there to tell? People just live—as their hearts tell them—so they live . . . today—good; tomorrow—bad. If this girl has got you—beat it out of here with her, and that's all there's to it. . . . If not—beat it just by yourself— You are young—plenty of time to get tied up with a skirt— [*Begins moving away.*]

VASKA. [*Takes him by the shoulder.*] Don't go. Tell me what you're up to in all this. . . .

LUKA. Wait a minute, let me go . . . I want to take a look at Anna—I heard her gasping— [*He goes to* ANNA'S *bed, pulls back the curtain, looks, touches her with his hand.* VASKA, *thoughtful and perplexed, follows him.*] Lord Jesus Christ, All-Merciful! Take into Your keeping the soul of this new arrival, Your servant Anna—

VASKA. [*Quietly.*] Is she dead? [*Without coming nearer he leans forward on tiptoe and looks at the bed.*]

LUKA. [*Quietly.*] Her suffering is over. . . . Where is that husband of her's?

VASKA. In the bar-room, of course. . . .

LUKA. Someone ought to tell him.

VASKA. [*Shuddering.*] I don't like dead ones.

LUKA. [*Goes to door.*] Why should one like them? One should like the living—the living. . . .

VASKA. I'm coming with you . . .

LUKA. You are afraid.

VASKA. I don't like it . . .

[*They go out quietly. Emptiness and silence. From the hall is heard a dull noise, irregular, un-understandable. After a while the* ACTOR *comes in.*]

ACTOR. [*Remains standing on the threshold without closing the door; supporting himself with his both hands against the frame he shouts.*] Hey, grandpa! Where are you? I got it—listen. [*Staggering, he takes two steps forward and recites.*]

> *"Since man on earth never gleams*
> *The truth he seeks to find*
> *Hail the madman who lulls mankind*
> *To sleep and golden dreams."*

[NATASHA *appears in the doorway behind the* ACTOR.] Listen, graybeard!

"Should next morn the sun disdain
To shine upon this earth forlorn,
'Twould illumine the world next morn
A thought from a madman's brain!"

NATASHA. [*Laughing.*] Scarecrow! You are stewed to the gills. . . .

ACTOR. [*Turning around to her.*] A-ha, so it's you? But—where is old grandpapa—that dear, old grandpapakin? Apparently, there is nobody home here— Natasha, good-bye—good-bye—yes, good-bye!

NATASHA. [*Coming in.*] He hasn't even said "Hello," and he already says "Good-bye" . . .

ACTOR. [*Getting in her way.*] I—am leaving, going away—Spring will soon come, and I—will no longer be here—

NATASHA. Let me get by—where do you think you are going?

ACTOR. Looking for a city—to get cured— You—go away, too . . . get thee to a nunnery, Ophelia. . . . Do you know, there is a curing-place for or-ga-ni-'sms . . . for drunks—a ma-arvel-lous curing-place—all marble—marble floors . . . sunlight—cleanliness—nourishment—all—for nothing! And marble floors, I am telling you! I will find it—I'll get cured and—start all over. . . . I am on my way to get born again . . . as what's his name said . . . King . . . Lear. Natasha, my stage name is Svertch-kov . . . nobody knows it, nobody! I have no name here. . . . Have you any idea how awful it is—to lose one's name? Even a dog

has a name— [NATASHA *cautiously slips away from the* ACTOR, *stops at* ANNA'S *bed, looks.*] Take away a man's name—and there's no man left—

NATASHA. Look! Come over here! She is dead!—

ACTOR. [*Shaking his head.*] I don't believe it—

NATASHA. [*Stepping back.*] Come! Look!

BUBNOV. [*In the door.*] Look at what?

NATASHA. At Anna—she is dead!

BUBNOV. In other words, she's stopped coughing. [*Walks over to* ANNA'S *bed, takes a look, goes back to his place.*] Better tell Andrei about it . . . that's—his business. . . .

ACTOR. I'll go—I'll tell him—she's lost her name! . . .

[*Goes out.*]

NATASHA. [*In the middle of the room.*] Some day—they'll find me, too—in a cellar—beaten to death. . . .

BUBNOV. [*Spreading a nondescript rag on his bunk.*] What are you raving about?

NATASHA. Oh, nothing—just talking to myself—

BUBNOV. Hangin' round for Vaska? Look out, one of these two, Vaska or Vasilisa, will break your neck for you—

NATASKA. Does it make any difference—which one of the two breaks it? I'd rather have Vaska do it. . . .

BUBNOV. [*Lying down.*] Well, that's your business. . . .

NATASHA. I guess it's just as well for her—that she died—but it's pitiful— Oh, God! What sense was there in *her* life?

BUBNOV. The same sense there is in any life: We are born, we live, we die. And I'll die, too—and so will you— What's there to make a fuss about?

[*Enter* LUKA, *the* TATAR, GRIZZLY *and* ANDREI. ANDREI *walks behind the rest, slowly, all shriveled up.*]

NATASHA. Sh . . . sh! Anna. . . .

GRIZZLY. We know it—she's in the Kingdom of Heaven, now that she's dead. . . .

TATAR. [*To* ANDREI.] You oughta drag she outa here! Drag she in hall—this—no place for dead—this—place to sleep for living—

ANDREI. [*In a low voice.*] All right, let's drag her out. . . . [*All walk toward the bed.*]

[ANDREI *looks at his wife over the others' shoulders.*]

GRIZZLY. [*To* TATAR.] Are you afraid she is gonna smell? Naw, she won't smell . . . she got all dried up when she was still alive—

NATASHA. God! If someone only showed a little pity—if anyone only said a kind word! Ah, you . . .

LUKA. Don't let that annoy you, little girl—don't take it to heart! Why should they . . . how could we—pity the dead? We don't pity—the living . . . we can't even pity ourselves—what do you expect!

BUBNOV. [*Yawning.*] Then again, death is not afraid

of words . . . when you are sick—words may help you . . . not when you are dead—

TATAR. [*Walking away.*] Me must go call police. . . .

GRIZZLY. Yes, the police—we must—Andrei, did you tell the police?

ANDREI. No. . . . She must be buried . . . and all I have is forty kopeks. . . .

GRIZZLY. Well, if that's all you have—borrow some—we'll all chip in—this one, five kopeks, that one—as much as he can—but you must tell the police, right away . . . if you don't they'll say you killed her or somethin'. . . .

NATASHA. [*Walks over to* BUBNOV'S *bunk.*] Now—I am gonna dream about her—I always dream of the dead—I am scared to go out alone—the hall is dark. . . .

LUKA. [*Following behind her.*] You better look out for the living—I'm telling you that—

NATASHA. Walk through the hall with me, grandpa. . . .

LUKA. All right . . . all right, I'll go with you! [*They go out.*]

[*Pause.*]

GRIZZLY. O-hum-hum! Hassan! Spring is coming soon, friend . . . we'll all be warm, then. On the farms the peasants are already sharpening their ploughs and spades —getting all ready to till—ah, well! And we? . . .

Hassan? . . . He's snoring already . . . the damn Turk. . . .

BUBNOV. Tatars just love to sleep. . . .

ANDREI. [*Stands in the middle of the cellar and stares vacantly in front of him.*] What am I goin' to do?

GRIZZLY. Lie down and go to sleep—that's all. . . .

ANDREI. [*Quietly.*] But—what—about—her? [*No one answers him.* SATIN *and the* ACTOR *come in.*]

ACTOR. [*Shouting.*] Come hither, my faithful Kent. . . .

SATIN. Midlookha-Maklai is going away—ho-hoh-ho!

ACTOR. Absolutely and positively! Graybeard, where is that city? Where are *you?*

SATIN. Fata Morgana! He lied to you, the old yarn-spinner. . . . There's nothing! No cities—no humanity —there's nothing!

ACTOR. You lie!

TATAR. [*Jumps up.*] Landlord! Me go tell landlord— No can sleep— No pay keep— Dead ones— Drunks. . . . [*He marches out hurriedly.* SATIN *whistles after him.*]

BUBNOV. [*In a sleepy voice.*] Go to bed, boys, stop your noise—when night comes one should go to sleep!

ACTOR. Yes . . . here—aha! A corpse! "Our nets have dragged up a corpse. . . ." poem by B-beranger! . . .

SATIN. [*Shouting.*] The dead—can't hear! The dead

can't feel! Shout . . . raise hell. . . . The dead can't hear . . . !

[*In the doorway appears* LUKA *carrying a lighted lamp and an open book. He walks over to* ANNA'S *bed and begins reading.*]

LUKA. [*Reading from book.*] "I am the Resurrection and the Life. . . ." [*He continues until the*]

CURTAIN

ACT III

ACT III

SCENE: *The Dump—a back-yard strewn with all sorts of rubbish and over-grown with tall weeds. In the background a high brick party-wall. It shuts out the sky. Near it are elder-bushes. On the right, a dark, wooden wall of some sort of dwelling, barn or stable. On the left is the gray, partially plastered wall of the structure in which* MICHAEL *runs his flop-house. It stands diagonally so that its further corner almost goes as far as the centre of the dump. Between it and the red wall is a narrow passage. In the flop-house wall there are two windows; one, on a level with the ground, the other about five feet higher, and nearer to the party-wall. Near this wall is a low, wide carrier-sledge, resting on sledge-slides, and a log, about ten feet long. On the right by this wall is a pile of squared boards.*

It is evening, the sun is setting, casting a reddish light on the brick wall. It is early spring, the snow has only recently melted. The black twigs of the elder-bushes are still without buds.

Side by side on the log, are seated NATASHA *and* NASTYA. ANDREI *is lying on the pile of boards on the right of the wall.* BUBNOV'S *ugly mug is framed in the ground-floor window.* LUKA *sits near the girls while the* BARON *sits grotesquely perched in the middle of a high ladder, centre.*

NASTYA. [*Closing her eyes, rocking her head to the*

rhythm of her words, and talking in sing-song.] And so during the night he comes to the garden, in the arbour, where we had agreed to hold our tryst. And I am already waiting for him a long, long time—and I just tremble from fright and agony. He also trembles all over and he is just as white as chalk and in his hands he clutches a reelvorver—

NATASHA. [*Chewing some seed.*] Gee! It's true, then, what they say, that students are awful desperate . . .

NASTYA. And he says to me in a terrible voice: "Dearest my love . . . my precious . . ."

BUBNOV. Ho! Ho! Precious—

BARON. Oh, shut up! If you don't like it—don't listen. Nobody asked you to butt in. . . . Yes, yes. Go on!

NASTYA. My adorable beloved, says he! My parents, he says, are refusing to give their consent for me to marry you, and they threaten to cut me off forever because of my love for you. There is nothing left for me to do, says he, I must take my life. . . . And his reelvorver was terrible big—and it was loaded with ten big bullets. . . . Farewell, says he, light of my life, treasure of my heart . . . my decision is absolutely final . . . to live without you—is just impossible. And I said to him: My never-to-be-forgotten friend—my Raoul—

BUBNOV. [*With astonishment.*] Wha-at? Who? Kraool?

BARON. [*Laughing.*] But Nastya dear, the last time it—it was Gaston.

NASTYA. [*Jumping up.*] Shut up you . . . miserable wretches! Ah, you filthy dogs! How—how could the likes of you understand—love? Real true love? But mine *was* a true love—it was *real*— [*To the* BARON.] You low-down good-for-nothing, you! An educated man, he calls himself . . . he took his cooffeee in bed—

LUKA. You shouldn't do-o it, friends! Don't you mix in like that—you should really respect her—respect all human beings—the word itself is not the thing, but—why the word is said—that's the thing. . . . Go on, little girl, don't mind them!

BUBNOV. Turn yourself into a peacock, crow . . . go to it!

BARON. Yes, yes. Go on!

NATASHA. Don't listen to them. . . . What are they? They act this way because they are jealous . . . they have nothing to tell about themselves. . . .

NASTYA. [*Sits down again.*] I don't want to any more . . . I'm not gonna tell them anything . . . if they're not gonna believe me—if they are gonna laugh at me—[*Suddenly, breaking off, she remains silent for a few seconds, and, once more closing her eyes, she resumes passionately and loudly, beating time with her hand to the rhythm of her speech, like one listening to distant music.*] And so—I reply to him like this: "Joy of my life! You are the bright moon in my sky! I, too, find it absolutely impossible to go on living in this world without you . . . because I will go on loving you just as madly as I love you now as long as my heart goes on

beating in my bosom—! But, says I, don't snuff out this young life of yours . . . your dear parents need you—you are all their joy and happiness to them—forget me! It is better that I should pine my life away from yearning for you . . . I am—alone in the world. I am this and that . . . it is just as well that I should perish—it doesn't matter! I am of no use to anybody . . . and I have nothing at all—nothing at all. . . . [*Covers her eyes with her hands and weeps silently.*]

NATASHA. [*Turning away, in a soft voice.*] Please don't cry . . . you mustn't!

[LUKA, *smiling, pats* NASTYA'S *hand.*]

BUBNOV. [*Laughing.*] Ah . . . the devil's own ragdoll! Eh?

BARON. [*To* LUKA, *also laughing.*] Grandpa! You don't think that's true, do you? That's all out of that book "Unrequited Love" . . . It's all—pure piffle! Don't bother with her!

NATASHA. What's that to you? You! Shut up—even if you have to drop dead to do it.

NASTYA. [*Bitterly, furiously.*] You have no heart—you have a cabbage there where your heart ought to be—what would you be doing with a—heart?

LUKA. [*Takes* NASTYA *by the hand.*] Let's go, my dear! Never mind . . . don't get mad! I understand . . . I —believe you. It's you who is right—not them— If—you believe you had a true love . . . that means, you really had one! You had! Don't be mad at him—he is your lover—maybe he was laughing because in his

heart he is jealous of you—he, maybe, never had a real love—never had anything real—come, child, let's go!

NASTYA. [*Firmly pressing her both hands to her heart.*] Grandpa! So help me God . . . it's true! It's all true! He was a student . . . French, he was . . . his name was Gaston . . . he had a small, black beard . . . used to wear patent-leather shoes . . . may I be struck by lightning right here on this spot . . . and he loved me so much . . . oh, so much!

LUKA. I—know! Never mind! I believe it! Did you say patent-leather shoes? Ai-ai-ai! Well—and did you love him a lot, too? [*They go out into the passage-way.*]

BARON. She's such a stupid slut . . . good-hearted, but stupid— I can't stand it!

BUBNOV. What is it that makes people like to lie so much. *Always!*—as if they were telling it to the judge —no fooling!

NATASHA. Because—to lie . . . is much nicer than to tell the truth—I, too . . .

BARON. You, too? Yes, yes, go on!

NATASHA. I think things—think and—wait.

BARON. What things?

NATASHA. [*Agitated, smiling.*] Well, just things. Sometimes, I think, tomorrow . . . somebody is going to come—someone—very unusual . . . or that something is going to happen—something awfully nice—that has never happened before . . . I wait and wait—always

keep on waiting—and yet . . . after all—what is there to wait for?

[*Pause.*]

BARON. [*With a laugh.*] There's nothing to wait for . . . I—wait for nothing! Everything already—was—*has* been—finished— Yes, yes. Go on!

NATASHA. And then there are times I imagine that tomorrow—I'll suddenly die . . . and when I imagine that—I get all excited! it's nice to think of death in the summertime . . . there are thunder storms in the summertime . . . you can always get struck by lightning. . . .

BARON. Your life is hard . . . this sister of yours is a devil—

NATASHA. And what life is—not hard? Everybody's life—is hard. . . . I only have to look. . . .

ANDREI. [*Until this time motionless and impassive, suddenly jumps up.*] Like hell it is—you lie! Not everybody's. If it was hard for everybody . . . then, alright . . . then it wouldn't be a dirty deal . . . ! Hell!

BUBNOV. What the hell bit you? Are you out of your head or something?

[ANDREI *again lies down on his place and growls.*]

BARON. Well, I'd better go and make up with my little Nastya. . . . If I don't she won't give me any money to gargle with. . . .

BUBNOV. Hmm . . . Everybody likes to tell lies . . . well, with Nastya I can easily understand. . . . She's got used to putting make-up on her mug—now she wants to put make-up on her life—smear her life with paint— But the others—why? Here is Luka, for example, he lies like hell . . . and without any benefit to himself . . . an old bird like him . . . why should *he?*

BARON. [*Smiles. Walks away.*] All people live drab, mouse-colored lives—and they all want to put a little rouge on it—

LUKA. [*Appearing from behind the corner.*] Say, cock-a-doodle, why do you always keep pecking at the poor girl? You should have let her alone—let her cry—she enjoys it . . . if it tickles her to shed tears what harm does it do *you?*

BARON. That's the bunk, old fellow! She gives me a pain—Raoul today, Gaston tomorrow, and always the same old twaddle. Anyway—I am going to make up with her. [*Goes out.*]

LUKA. Hurry up about it . . . pet her a little . . . a little petting does nobody no harm—

NATASHA. You are so good, grandpa. . . . How is it you are so good?

LUKA. Good, did you say? Well . . . it's all right, if it's *so* . . . all right, all right!! [*From behind the red wall comes the sound of an accordion and a song.*] There ought to be someone, little girl, who is good . . . someone with real pity for people. . . . Christ had pity for all and told us to do the same. . . . I am telling ye

—show a man pity and you do yourself a favor. Here, for example. I worked as a watchman at a country house, owned by an engineer, in some city in Tomsk. . . . That's in Siberia. . . . Well, that's that! The house stood in a forest, a thousand miles from nowhere . . . and it was winter and me all alone in that house. Good enough—! But one night—I listen—sure enough —someone climbing—

NATASHA. Bandits?

LUKA. You guessed it. As I was saying, they were climbing. All right. I take my gun—go outside—I look —two of them . . . they open a window—both so blamed busy they don't even see me. I yell at them: "Hey, you! Get out of here!" And they, well, go after me with axes. I warn them: "Stand back, there, or I'll shoot!" And I aim my gun now at one, now at the other. So both fall on their knees— "No, no, we'd rather *not* be shot!" Well, I am pretty mad . . . because of the axes, you see. So I say: "I chased you two wolves— you didn't go . . . now, says I, one of you go chop some twigs!" He chopped. "Now," I command—to one, "You, here, lie down"; to the other—"You there— you padoodle him." So the two of them give each other plenty padoodling. And how they padoodled. Then they say to me: "Uncle," they say, "for the sake of Jesus give us a bite of bread." "Here we are for days," they say, "without a nose-bag!" Here are bandits for you, my dear . . . [*Laughs.*] Axes and everything! Yes— both of them good peasants at heart. I say to them: "You wolves should have asked me for chow in the first place!" And they— "We are sick," they say, "of ask-

ing. You ask and ask, but nobody gives, it's tough!" So they lived with me all winter. One, Stepan they called him, would take my own gun and go hunting in the woods. . . . And the other, that was Yakov, was sick a lot, always coughing. . . . Well, so there were three of us, all watchmen. . . . Spring came—"Good-bye, uncle," they said, and off they went—back to their own part of the woods.

NATASHA. They were runaways? Escaped convicts?

LUKA. That's just it . . . runaways . . . got away from their place of exile—good peasants at heart! If I hadn't shown them real pity—they might have killed me, mebbe . . . they had my gun, you see—or even worser . . . and then—a trial, and prison, and Siberia —what's the good of it? Prison doesn't teach anyone to be good, and Siberia doesn't teach. . . . But a man can teach another—yes, sirree! One man can teach another to be good . . . very simply—by being good himself— Show a man pity and do yourself a favor!

BUBNOV. You are not doing Nastya a favor by kidding her!— Here am I—I can't lie! Why do it? As for me— I believe in shooting the truth, just as is! What's there to stop us?

ANDREI. [*Jumps up again like one on fire and shouts.*] What truth? Where—truth? [*Tearing his ragged clothes with his hands.*] Here's the truth! No work—no strength! That's—the truth! No roof—no roof over your head! You gotta croak—that's the truth for you! Hell! What good is it to me—the truth? Gimme a chance to breathe . . . to breathe is what I want! What have

I ever done? . . . What for do *I* want—the truth? I can't live—god damn it—I can't live. . . . There's the truth!

BUBNOV. There he goes—off his nut again!

LUKA. Lord bless my soul! Listen here, my dear fellow! You . . .

ANDREI. [*Trembling from excitement.*] You tell me there's—tru-th! You, old graybeard, you comfort everybody—I tell you—I hate everybody! And this truth—to hell with it! God damn it! Get me? That's what I say—god damn it! [*He runs around the corner, looking about him.*]

LUKA. Ai-ai-ai! Such a tantrum! And where did he go in such a rush?

NATASHA. He's gone clear out of his head!

BUBNOV. Well, he got rid of a lot of steam—it was as good as going to a show. . . . He gets like that, once in a while— He isn't yet *used* to life. . . .

VASKA. [*Comes slowly from around the corner.*] What's this, a Sunday-school meeting? Well, grandpa, you old fox, are you still telling them fish-stories?

LUKA. You should have heard the hullaballoo that fellow made!

VASKA. That was Andrei, wasn't it? What's the matter with him? He was running like a poisoned rat. . . .

LUKA. You'd run like that too—if something got busted inside *you*. . . .

VASKA. [*Sits down.*] I don't like him . . . he's an awful grouch—and stuck up besides. [*Imitating* ANDREI.] "I—am a working-man!" He thinks he's better than anybody else. . . . If you want to work—work—what's there to be stuck up about? If we are gonna rate a man by the work he does . . . then a horse is a damned sight better than any man—he pulls—and keeps his mouth shut! Natasha, are the folks here?

NATASHA. They went to vespers—

VASKA. Well, well, I see you got a night off—for a change.

LUKA. [*Meditatively, to* BUBNOV.] Here—you talk about the truth. Truth is not always the best remedy—you can't always use the naked truth to cure a heart. Let me, for example, tell you of a particular case: I once knew a man who believed there was a promised land. . . .

BUBNOV. A wha-at?

LUKA. A promised land. "Somewhere in this world," he said, "there must be a promised land." . . . In that land, he figured, they send nice people—people who are good. There men respect one another, every-which-way help one another and life for them is just Paradise! Well, so this man got himself all ready to go—in search of this promised land. Poor—as a mouse, lived a miserable life . . . but even when it got so bad he could just lie down and die—he didn't lose heart, but would

only smile and say to himself: "Never mind! I can stand it! I'll wait just a little longer and then—I'll chuck this kind of life and I'll be a-goin' to the promised land. . . . That was the only happiness he knew —this land of promise—

VASKA. Well? Did he find it?

BUBNOV. Where? Ho-ho!

LUKA. Well, there was sent to this place—it happened in Siberia—a convict, a professor or something. He came with loads of books, this professor, and maps and plans, and all sorts of hokus-pokus. . . . So this fellow speaks to the professor: "Be so kind," says he, "and tell me where is this promised land and how can I find the road to get me there?" Right away the professor opens his books, unrolls his maps, looks and looks—no promised land nowhere! *There* are the maps —no doubt about it—they show each and every land, but a promised land—no such thing—

VASKA. [*Softly.*] Well, was there no such place?

[BUBNOV *laughs.*]

NATASHA. Keep quiet, you. . . . Well, grandpa?

LUKA. The man—he just doesn't believe. "There must be one," he says, "look again" "Otherwise," he says, "your books and maps are not worth a hang, if they don't show the promised land." That makes the professor mad. "My maps," he says, "are right, and if they don't show a promised land then there *is* no promised land!" Well, when he hears that the man gets ter-

rible mad. "How come?" says he, "here I have lived and lived, suffered and suffered, always believing there *is* one and now it comes out by the maps there *ain't* one!" So he says to the professor: "Ah, you dirty dog! You are no professor—you are a son of a bitch!—" and he punched him on the nose—once—twice—lots of times! [*After a silence.*] And then he went home and —hanged himself.

[*All remain silent.* LUKA *smiling, looks at* VASKA *and* NATASHA.]

VASKA. [*In low voice.*] G-go to-to the devil—your story gives me the creeps!

NATASHA. He couldn't stand it—being cheated.

BUBNOV. [*Morosely.*] It's all—a lot of bunk.

VASKA. That's it . . . looks like your promised land just ain't. . . .

NATASHA. I feel sorry for that man.

BUBNOV. Just another of his fish-tales, too— Ho-ho! Promised land! Let's go there! Ho-ho-ho! [*He disappears from the window.*]

LUKA. [*Nodding his head towards* BUBNOV'S *window.*] He laughs! He-he-he . . . [*A pause.*] Well, children, may you live and prosper! I'll be leaving you soon. . . .

VASKA. Where do you go from here?

LUKA. To the sticks—in Little Russia—I hear they found a new religion there—I must look into it . . . I must . . . People are always looking for something

. . . always wanting something better . . . give them patience, Lord.

VASKA. What do you think? Will they find it?

LUKA. Will they? They will! Anyone who seeks—finds . . . anyone who wants to enough—finds.

NATASHA. If only they did find something—think up something better. . . .

LUKA. They are—thinking up things! We must help them, little girl, respect them. . . .

NATASHA. How could I help anyone? I am myself—helpless.

VASKA. [*With decision.*] Once again—once more I'm gonna talk to you . . . Natasha—right before him—he knows all—come with me!

NATASHA. Where to? Jail?

VASKA. I've already told you—I'm gonna quit the game! S'help me God—I'll quit it! If I said so—I'll do it! I can read—'n'—write . . . I'll go to work. . . . Here he's been telling me to go to Siberia on my own—let's go there, what? Do you think this life of mine doesn't disgust me? Ah, Natasha! I know . . . I see well enough! I excuse myself when I see others, bigger crooks than *I* am, living on top of the world. But that doesn't help *me* any! That's not—it . . . I am not sorry for anything . . . conscience doesn't mean a thing to me. . . . But—one thing—I do know—I must live—different! I must live a better life! I must live so that I could respect myself. . . .

LUKA. Right, my friend! God be with you . . . Christ help you! Right—a man must respect himself. . . .

VASKA. From the time I was knee-high to a grasshopper I have been a—thief! Everybody always used to holler at me: "Vaska is a thief, Vaska is the son of a thief!" Yeah? That's so? Well, the hell with you! Here I am—a thief! You see, maybe it's just out of spite that I am a thief . . . I am a thief because nobody, never, thought of calling me by any other name . . . you do it, Natasha, what do you say?

NATASHA. [*Sadly.*] I don't believe somehow—in any words. . . . And I feel uneasy today—there's a weight on my heart . . . like I'm waiting for something terrible to happen. . . . You've chosen the wrong day, Vasily, for this kind of talk.

VASKA. It's always the wrong day. . . . This is not the first time I talk to you—

NATASHA. And why should I go with you? When it comes down—to loving you—I am not very much in love with you—. At times—I like you . . . at other times I can't stand the sight of you—that shows I am not in love with you. When you are in love with someone you never see any faults in a person—but I—see faults in you—

VASKA. You'll *get* to love me—don't worry about that! I'll teach you to care for me—if you'll only say yes! I've been watching you now for over a year—and you are just the kind of girl I want—you are strong—you

are decent—the kind of girl you can trust— I fell for you—terribly— I love you so very much—

[VASILISA, *all dolled up, appears in the window, and stands listening, partly hidden by the window-frame.*]

NATASHA. Yeah! You *fell* for *me* all right. What about my sister?

VASKA. [*Embarrassed.*] Well, what about her? The streets are full of the likes of her. . . .

LUKA. Don't you worry about nothing, little girl! If you have no bread you can always go picking berries—gooseberries, raspberries, all sorts of berries—

VASKA. [*Morosely.*] You—be good to me! My life is not any too easy—it's a dog's life—damn little joy in it—I feel like I am sinking in a swamp . . . you grab hold of everything—everything is—rotten—everything—falls to pieces— Your sister—I thought she'd be the one, but—she wasn't just that— If she didn't think so much of money—I would have gone to hell for her! If she only could have been—all mine. . . . Well, she had to have other things . . . she—had to have money—had to have freedom—and she wanted to be free just so she could raise all the hell she wanted. That's why she can be of no help to me. But you—you are like a young spruce-tree—you may be bent but you always stand up. . . .

LUKA. Take my advice, little girl, go with him, go! He's a good kid, with all his faults! Only you've got to tell him once in a while that he is a good kid, so that, you

see, he won't forget about it. He will take your word for it. . . . All you have to say to him is: "Vaska, remember, you are a good kid . . . don't forget it!" Just think, my dear, where else could you go if not with him? Your sister—is a wild beast; as for her husband, the less said the better—the old man is rotten beyond words. . . . And all this life here—where will you go? But this kid here—he is strong. . . .

NATASHA. No place to go . . . I know . . . I thought about it. . . . Only I just don't believe anybody . . . and there is no place I can go to . . . no way out—

VASKA. There's one way . . . well, you are not gonna go that way—I'd rather kill you first . . .

NATASHA. [*Smiling.*] Here you are. . . . I am not your wife yet, and you already want to kill me.

VASKA. [*Embraces her.*] Forget it, Natasha! Say, it's all right!

NATASHA. [*Pressing close to him.*] Only—I want to tell you one thing, Vasily. . . . I am talking to you just as I would before God! The very first time you lay hands on me—or hurt me in any other way . . . I—will not just be sorry for myself—I'll either hang myself, or . . .

VASKA. May my hand be paralyzed if I ever touch you!

LUKA. Never mind, my dear, don't let that trouble you! He needs you more than you—him.

VASILISA. [*From the upper window.*] Well, well, so they are engaged! Advice to the lovelorn, 'n everything!

NATASHA. They've come back! Oh, my God! They've seen us—ah, Vasily—

VASKA. What did you get scared for? Now *nobody dares* touch you!

VASILISA. Don't be afraid, Natalia! He'll never beat you . . . he knows neither how to beat nor how to love—I know!

LUKA. [*In an undertone.*] Ah, that wench—poisonous snake. . .

VASILISA. He likes to hear himself talk, that's all. . . .

MICHAEL. [*In upper window.*] Natashka! What are you doing there, you lazy lummox? Gabbing, what? Complaining about your family? Haven't you made the samovar yet? Or even washed the dishes?

NATASHA. [*Going out.*] I thought you said you were going to church . . .

MICHAEL. None of your business *where* we were going —you should tend to your own business . . . do as you are told!

VASKA. Shut up, you! She is no longer your servant . . . Natalia, don't go . . . don't do nothing!

NATASHA. Don't you—give me orders . . . it's too early for that! [*Goes out.*]

VASKA. [*To* MICHAEL.] You are not gonna get away with it, no more! You used the girl enough! Now she is—mine!

MICHAEL. You—urs? When did you buy her? How much did you pay?

[VASILISA *is laughing.*]

LUKA. Vasya! You—go out. . . .

VASKA. Look out, you! You laugh now—maybe I'll give you reason to weep—

VASILISA. Oo, that's terrible! Oo—I'm scared!

LUKA. Vasily—go out for a walk! Don't you see? She's just trying to get under your skin—to get you mad—don't you understand?

VASKA. So that's it—aha! Here's where you get fooled! You are not gonna get what you want!

VASILISA. And I am not gonna get what I don't want, either, Vasya!

VASKA. [*Shaking his fist at her.*] We'll see! [*He goes out.*]

VASILISA. [*Disappearing.*] I'll fix a wedding for you!

[MICHAEL, *above,* LUKA, *below, sing.*]

MICHAEL. [*Appearing at the upper window, singing.*] Well, how goes it, old fellow?

LUKA. [*Also singing.*] So-so, old fellow!

MICHAEL. That's good. . . . You are going away, I hear?

LUKA. Yah . . .

MICHAEL. Where to?

LUKA. Where my nose will lead me. . . .

MICHAEL. Just tramping, eh? I notice, you don't find it convenient to stay long at any one place. . . .

LUKA. A stone planted in the ground, they say, will get no water to flow under it. . . .

MICHAEL. That's all right for a stone. But a man should live in one place. . . . Men can't live like cockroaches —if *they* want to go some place they just crawl over there. . . . A man must settle down to some place— not tramp around willy-nilly over the earth. . . .

LUKA. And what if one finds his place—all over?

MICHAEL. That must be because he is a tramp—a useless fellow— Every man should have some use . . . should be working at something. . . .

LUKA. Oh, go on!

MICHAEL. That's so. Lookee here! You call yourself a pilgrim— Just what is a—pilgrim? A strange fellow— different from everybody else. . . . If he is a real pilgrim, he perhaps knows something . . . perhaps he finds out something which just the same is no good to anybody—he even may find some new truth . . . well, not every truth is necessary . . . that's so. In that case he'll keep it to himself . . . and keep his mouth shut. If he is an honest to God—pilgrim—he keeps his mouth shut! Or he tells it in such a way that no one can understand him. . . . And he—never wants nothing, never butts in nowhere, don't get people all worked up for nothing. . . . How people live—is none of *his* business. . . . He must live an upright life . . . in the

woods . . . in caves . . . out of sight. . . . And he must not butt in to nobody, mustn't judge nobody . . . but should pray—for all—for all the world's sins . . . for my sins, for your sins . . . for everybody's sins! That's why he runs away from the world's hustle-bustle —so that he could pray. That's why . . . [*A pause.*] But you . . . what kind of a pilgrim are you? You ain't even got a patchport . . . to be decent a fellow must have a patchport . . . all decent folk have patchports . . . they have!

LUKA. There be—folks, and there be—others—just men—

MICHAEL. Don't you get smart! Don't hand me any conundrums . . . I'm just as smart as you are . . . what's the difference between folks and men?

LUKA. Where is the conundrum? All I say is—some soil is no good for tilling—while some other soil is very rich—anything you plant in it—grows . . . that's all there is to it. . . .

MICHAEL. Well, what of it?

LUKA. Here, let me explain. . . . If God Himself said to you: "Michael! Be a man!" it wouldn't make the slightest difference—nothing would come of it . . . you would still remain—the same damn fool . . .

MICHAEL. But—but—do you know to whom you are talking? Don't forget my wife has an uncle on the police force . . . and if I should only—

VASILISA. [*At upper window.*] Michael, come have your tea.

MICHAEL. [*To* LUKA.] You—get this: get the hell outa here! Get out of this house.

VASILISA. Yes, run along, old man—your tongue is much too long—and who knows? Maybe you are some sort of jail-breaker!

MICHAEL. Don't let me get as much as a smell of you this very day! If I catch sight of you—look out!

LUKA. You'll call your uncle? Go ahead, call your uncle—tell him you've caught a jail-bird—maybe your uncle will get a reward—all of three kopeks!

BUBNOV. [*In the lower window.*] What are you selling? What's it for—three kopeks?

LUKA. It's only me they are threatening to sell.

VASILISA. [*To her husband.*] Let's go!

BUBNOV. For three kopeks? Well, look out, old man . . . they'll sell you for even one kopek. . . .

MICHAEL. [*To* BUBNOV.] You—popped up like a devil out of hell!

VASILISA. How many shady people there are in the world—and so many crooks! [*She turns to go.*]

LUKA. Hope you enjoy your tea!

VASILISA. [*Turning around.*] Oh, shut your mouth . . . you toadstool! [*She and her husband disappear from window, after she slams it shut.*]

LUKA. Today after dark . . . I'm off—

BUBNOV. That's best. To get out at the right time is always best.

LUKA. Right you are!

BUBNOV. I ought to know. I saved myself a job cracking rocks by getting out at the right time.

LUKA. I am listening.

BUBNOV. That's true. It was this way: My wife took a shine to another furrier . . . I will say *that* for him—he was a damn good furrier—it was easy as pie for him to dye dogs so that they looked like raccoons—cats, too, he could change to kangaroos, muskrats—any animal. Clever as hell. Well, so my wife gets sweet on him—and they go crazy about each other so much as to make me look out either against them poisoning me, or their getting rid of me some other way. I used to beat *her* and he used to beat me. We gave each other awful wallopings. Once he pulled off half my whiskers and broke one of my ribs. Well, I was sore as hell. Once I cracked the wife on the head with a flat-iron and, all in all, there was big war all around. Then, one day, I saw I wasn't gonna get nowhere—they would get the best of me, anyway! So I started thinking I'd send the wife to the undertaker—seriously thinking . . . but I caught myself just in time and beat it off—

LUKA. That's much better, much! Let them stay there and change dogs to raccoons!

BUBNOV. Trouble is—the shop was in the wife's name . . . and I was left—as you see. Though, truth to tell,

I'd have boozed the shop away, anyhow. I'm a booze-hound, as you can see for yourself.

LUKA. A bo-ooze-hound? Ah-ah!

BUBNOV. A terrible booze-hound—when I start guzzling I booze away everything, even my pants. . . . And then —I am awful lazy.—It's a crime how I hate to work!

[SATIN *and the* ACTOR *come in, arguing.*]

SATIN. That's the bunk! You are not going nowhere . . . it's all a lot of poppycock! Graybeard! What sort of rubbish did you dump into the ear of this nincompoop?

ACTOR. You lie! Grand-dad! Tell him that he lies! I—am going! I—worked today, I cleaned up a street—not a drop of vodka did I drink! What do you think of that? Here it is—two silver pieces—thirty kopeks—and I'm as sober as a judge—

SATIN. That's stupid and then some! Give it to me—I'll either gargle or gamble it away!

ACTOR. Go to the devil! This is for my trip!

LUKA. [*To* SATIN.] You, there—what's the idea trying to talk him out of it?

SATIN. Tell me, sorcerer, darling of the gods—what does the future hold for me? I have wrecked myself, brother, I have went to the dogs. Still, all is not lost yet, granny—there are card-sharks in this world smarter than I.

LUKA. You are a cheerful fellow, my boy—always making fun!

BUBNOV. Hey, actor! Come over here!

[*The* ACTOR *walks to the window and sits on the sill. He and* BUBNOV *talk quietly.*]

SATIN. I, brother, was quite a young fellow in my day! It feels good to think of it! I was *some* boy! I danced magnificently, acted on the stage, always loved to make people laugh. . . . It was swell. . . .

LUKA. How did you manage to get side-tracked like this, eh?

SATIN. Little graybeard, you are so terribly curious! You want to know everything . . . and—what for?

LUKA. I want to understand the ways of all men . . . but I look at you—and I don't understand! Here you are, a fine fellow, my lad, and nobody's fool . . . and all of a sudden—

SATIN. Jail, granny! Four years and seven months I warmed a jail-bench. And after jail—there's no place to go!

LUKA. Oho-ho! What were *you* in for?

SATIN. Because of a skunk. . . . I killed the skunk in a fit of fury. . . . In jail I also learned to play cards. . . .

LUKA. You killed him—because of a woman?

SATIN. Because of my own sister— Look here—you cut it out! I don't like to be questioned about it. . . . Any-

way—all *that* happened a long time ago—my sister died —nine years have passed—she was a marvellous girl, brother, this little sister of mine!

LUKA. You take life easy! But the locksmith was here a little while ago—and how he hollered . . . a-a-yai!

SATIN. Andrei?

LUKA. Yah. "There ain't no work," he hollers, "there ain't no nothin'!"

SATIN. He'll get used to it. . . . What do you think *I* ought to do?

LUKA. [*Quietly.*] Look! Here he comes. . . .

[ANDREI *walks in, slowly, his head down.*]

SATIN. Hey, widower! Why are you dragging your tail? What's going on in that noodle of yours?

ANDREI. I'm thinking: what am I going to do? I ain't got no tools—no nothing—the funeral ate up all I had—

SATIN. Let me give you some advice: Do nothing! Just make yourself a burden on the world! . . .

ANDREI. It's all right for *you* to talk. . . . I still have some shame left before people—

SATIN. Chuck it! People aren't ashamed to let you live worse than a dog. . . . Just think—*you* quit work, *I* quit work—several hundred *more* quit—*thousands, everybody!* Y'understand? Everybody quits work! Nobody wants to do a damn thing any more—what will happen then?

ANDREI. Everybody would just starve to death. . . .

LUKA. [*To* SATIN.] You should tell these things to the sect known as "runners"—there is such a sect, they call themselves "runners" . . . you ought to talk to them —if you can catch them—

SATIN. I heard about them. . . . They are no fools, grand-daddy!

[*From* MICHAEL'S *window comes the cry of* NATASHA: *"What for? Stop! What fo-or?"*]

LUKA. [*Uneasy.*] Natasha? Was that her crying? Huh? Ah, you . . .

[*From* MICHAEL'S *quarters comes a din, a clatter, the sound of broken dishes and the shrill cry of* MICHAEL: *"Ah, you . . . infidel . . . you slut!"* . . .]

VASILISA. [*Unseen.*] Hold on—wait— . . . I'll tend to her—take that—and that—

NATASHA. [*From within.*] Help! Help! They are killing me. . . .

SATIN. [*Shouting in the window.*] Hey, you there!

LUKA. [*Running around anxiously.*] If only Vasily—we should call Vasya— Oh, Lord! Brothers . . . children . . .

ACTOR. [*Running out.*] I'll go look for him . . . right away. . . .

BUBNOV. Well, they have taken to beating her often these days. . . .

SATIN. Come, graybeard! Let's be witnesses!

LUKA. [*Following behind* SATIN.] What good will that do? Where is—Vasily ought to get here quick—

NATASHA. [*Within.*] Sister . . . sisterkin . . . Va-a-a . . .

BUBNOV. They've gagged her. . . . I'm gonna take a look. . . .

[*The noise in* MICHAEL'S *quarters gets quieter, comes from farther off, having apparently moved from the room into the hall. The old man's cry; "Stop, it!" is heard. A door is slammed loudly, and this sound cuts off abruptly all other sounds. On the stage all is quiet. Evening shadows gather.*]

ANDREI. [*Sits, indifferently, on the sleigh, vigorously rubbing his hands. He then starts to mumble something—at first indistinctly, as from a distance.*] What then? I must live . . . [*Loudly.*] I must have a roof . . . well? No roof . . . no nothing! . . . a man alone . . . alone, all by himself . . . nobody to help . . .

[*Slowly, bent over, he walks out. Several seconds of ominous silence. Then—somewhere from the hallway comes forth a confusion of* VOICES, *a chaos of sounds. It grows, comes nearer. Individual voices can be heard.*]

VASILISA. I'm her sister! Let go. . . .

MICHAEL. What right have *you?*

VASILISA. You jail-bird. . . .

SATIN. Get Vaska! . . . Quick . . . Grizzly . . . wallop him!

[*A police whistle.*]

TATAR. [*Comes running in— His right hand is in a sling.*] Is there law—say all right to kill?

GRIZZLY. [*Followed by* ABRAMKA.] Ah, I biffed him one!

ABRAMKA. You—how dare you fight?

TATAR. And you? Why you no stop fight?

ABRAMKA. [*Chasing* GRIZZLY.] Stop, gimme back my whistle. . . .

MICHAEL. [*Running in.*] Abram! Grab him . . . nail him! He's a murderer. . . .

[*From around the corner come* KVASHNYA *and* NASTYA *—leading by the arms* NATASHA, *who is all dishevelled.* SATIN *comes backing in, pushing back* VASILISA, *who, waving her arms, is trying to hit her sister. Near her* ALYOSHKA *is jumping around like a wild man, whistling in her ears, shouting, snorting. Behind the others come several more ragged figures, men and women.*]

SATIN. [*To* VASILISA.] Where are you going—you damn bitch!

VASILISA. Out of my way, jail-bird! If it costs my life —I'll tear you in pieces. . . .

KVASHNYA. [*Leading* NATASHA *farther off.*] Say you, Vasilisa, that's enough—you should be ashamed! Why be like a wild animal?

ABRAMKA. [*Grabbing* SATIN.] Aha—I got you this time!

SATIN. Grizzly! Wallop them! Vaska . . . Vaska!—

[*They all struggle in a mass near the passage, by the brick wall. They take* NATASHA *off to the right, where they sit her on the pile of lumber.*]

VASKA. [*Rushes in from the passage-way, and silently, with powerful movements, pushes everybody aside.*] Where is Natalia? You . . .

MICHAEL. [*Hiding around the corner.*] Abram! Nab Vaska . . . brothers—help nail Vaska! The thief . . . the robber. . . .

VASKA. And you—you old bastard! [*He swings a terrific wallop at the old man.* MICHAEL *falls in such a way that only the upper part of his body is seen from around the corner.* VASKA *rushes to* NATASHA.]

VASILISA. Smash Vaska! Please, everybody—wallop the thief!

ABRAMKA. [*Yelling at* SATIN.] You keep out of this . . . this is a family affair! *They* are—related . . . but who are you?

VASKA. [*To* NATASHA.] What did she do to you? Did she use a knife?

KVASHNYA. Just see what the beasts have done! They've scalded the girl's feet with boiling water. . . .

NASTYA. They knocked down the samovar. . . .

TATAR. Maybe—accident . . . no tell sure—no can guess—

NATASHA. [*Nearly fainting.*] Vasily . . . take me away—hide me—

VASILISA. Friends! Look! Come and look! He's dead! Someone killed him. . . .

[*All crowd in the passage-way, near* MICHAEL. BUBNOV *emerges from the crowd and walks over to* VASKA.]

BUBNOV. [*In an undertone.*] Vaska—! The old fellow is—cooked!

VASKA. [*Looks in front of him, as though he doesn't understand.*] Go call an ambulance—she must be taken to the hospital . . . well, I'll get even with them!

BUBNOV. I am telling you—someone knocked the old man cold. . . .

[*The din on the scene dies out like a bonfire sprayed with water. There are heard distinct exclamations spoken in whispers: "Is he dead?" "Really?" "There's a todo!" "We-ell?" "Let's go, brother!" "Ah, the devil!" "Now —calm yourself!" The crowd grows smaller, disappears;* BUBNOV, TATAR, NASTYA *and* KVASHNYA *rush over to* MICHAEL'S *body.*]

VASILISA. [*Rising from the ground, she shouts in a triumphant voice.*] They've murdered my husband! Here's the murderer! Vaska murdered him! I saw him do it! I am telling you—I saw him— It's Vaska! Police!

VASKA. [*To* BUBNOV. *Moving away from* NATASHA.] Leave me alone . . . get away! [*He looks at the body —to* VASILISA.] Well? Are you glad? [*Touches the corpse with his foot.*] He has kicked off . . . the old dog! It came out just as you wanted . . . I might as well finish the job on you! [*He rushes at her.* SATIN *and* GRIZZLY *quickly grab him.* VASILISA *hides herself quickly behind the corner.*]

SATIN. Calm yourself!

GRIZZLY. Whoa, there! Where are you galloping?

VASILISA. [*Appearing.*] What do you say now, Vaska, darling? You can't get away from what is written in the book. . . . Police! Abram . . . whistle!

ABRAMKA. The bastards have swiped my whistle!

ALYOSHKA. Here it is! [*He whistles*—ABRAMKA *chases him.*]

SATIN. [*Leading* VASKA *to* NATASHA.] Vaska—don't worry! A murder in a brawl—is a trifle! You won't get much for it. . . .

VASILISA. Nab Vaska! He murdered . . . I saw it!

SATIN. I gave the old fellow three wallops myself. . . . It did not take much to fix him. . . . Call me as a witness, Vaska. . . .

VASKA. I—don't need to defend myself. . . . I want to get Vasilisa into this—and I'll get her! It was she who wanted it . . . she tried to talk me into killing her husband . . . that's just what she did!

ACT III

Vasilisa: "They've murdered my husband!" (p. 105)

NATASHA. [*Suddenly, loudly.*] A-ha! Now I understand! So, Vasily?! Listen, everybody, they are two of a kind! My sister and—he . . . they are two of a kind. . . ! They had it all planned! So Vasily? That's why you spoke to me a while ago . . . so she could hear? Listen, everybody! She's his mistress . . . you know it . . . everybody knows it . . . they are two of a kind! She—it was she who talked him into killing her husband. . . . The husband was in their way . . . and I was in their way. . . . So they crippled me. . . .

VASKA. Natalia! What's the matter! What's the matter?

SATIN. If this isn't the damndest!

VASILISA. You lie! She lies . . . I . . . he, Vaska, killed him!

NATASHA. They are two of a kind! God damn you! Both of you!

SATIN. W-well, some play, this! Watch out, Vasily, between the two of them you'll be sunk.

GRIZZLY. It's impossible to understand. . . . Ah, you . . . this business . . . monkey-business . . . bah!

VASKA. Natalia! Do you—really? Do you believe, that I . . . with her . . .

SATIN. I swear to you, Natasha . . . you are just imagining it!

VASILISA. [*In the passage.*] They've killed my husband, your honor . . . Vaska Pepel, a thief, he murdered

him, Mr. Inspector! I—saw him do it—I saw everything—

NATASHA. [*Raving almost in a delirium.*] Everybody, listen . . . my sister and Vaska killed him. . . . Police —listen . . . this one here, my sister, she put him up to it . . . talked him into it . . . he is her lover . . . here he is, damn him! They both killed him! Take them . . . try them . . . take me, too . . . put me in jail! For the sake of Christ!—put me in jail! . . .

CURTAIN

ACT IV

ACT IV

SCENE: *The same set as the first act. But Vaska's room is no longer in it, the partitions knocked out. And on the spot where* ANDREI *used to sit there is no longer the anvil. In the corner, where Vaska's room used to be lies the* TATAR. *He tosses about and groans at times. Seated at the table is* ANDREI. *He is repairing an accordion, now and then testing the stops. At the other end of the table are* SATIN, *the* BARON, *and* NASTYA. *Before them is a bottle of vodka, three bottles of beer, a large hunk of bread. On the oven, tossing around and coughing, is the* ACTOR.

Night. The scene is lighted by a lamp, standing on the centre of the table. Outside blows the wind.

ANDREI. Ya-a. He vamoosed at the time of the rumpus.

BARON. He dusted it from the cops like a bat out of hell.

SATIN. That's how sinners scamper from the presence of the just.

NASTYA. He was decent, the old fellow. But you—you are not men. You are—just a blight.

BARON. [*Drinking.*] Your health, mademoiselle.

SATIN. He was a nosey old bird—I'll say he was. Little Nastya here—she fell for him.

NASTYA. I loved him, yes—and fell in love with him! I don't care *who* knows it! He saw everything—understood everything—

SATIN. [*Laughing.*] And altogether . . . for a great many he was like—mush to the toothless.

BARON. [*Laughing.*] Like salve for sores.

ANDREI. He had *sympathy* for people—you all ain't got no sympathy—

SATIN. What use would it be to you if I gave you sympathy?

ANDREI. Just the same—even if you can't give sympathy you might at least not rub it in—

TATAR. [*Seats himself on the bunk and rocks his sore hand like one rocking a baby.*] Da old man—he good. He know law of heart. He dat know law of heart—he good. Who no mind law—he no good.

BARON. What law, prince?

TATAR. Dat law—all kinda law—you know what law . . .

BARON. Yes, yes, go on!

TATAR. You no hurt nobody—dat's da law.

SATIN. That comes under the volume entitled:—"Statutes, Rules and Regulations of the Criminal Code, Punitive and Corrective. . . ."

BARON. And also:—"Statutes, Rules, Regulations, Ordinances and Punishments for Offenses against Public Order, Public Morals, and Public Decency."

TATAR. Da law—dey call her da Koran. For you Koran should be da law. And da heart should be da Koran—Yes!

ANDREI. [*Testing the accordion.*] It sneezes, damn it! The prince is right . . . a man must live by the law—by the Gospel. . . .

SATIN. All right, live. . . .

BARON. Try and do it. . . .

TATAR. Mohammed—he give Koran. Him say: "Dat'sa da law! You do what she write!" Bye an' bye come time—Koran no good no more . . . then time—she give law herself—new law. Time—she make new law all da time. . . .

SATIN. You said it. . . . There came *a* time and it gave birth to "Statutes, Rules and Regulations of the Criminal Code." Mother and child still doing well, thank you. They won't even change the diapers!

NASTYA. [*Bangs table with her glass.*] And why—what for do I go on living here—with such as you—I'll get away from here—I'll go somewhere—to the end of the world!

BARON. Without shoes, mademoiselle?

NASTYA. I'll go naked! I'll crawl on all fours if I have to!

BARON. That would make an eye-full, mademoiselle—naked on all fours.

NASTYA. I don't care. I'd crawl. Anything not to have to look at your faces again. Oh, I'm sick of everything —life—people. . . !

SATIN. If you go take the actor along. . . . He is going to the same place. . . . He's just found out that all of a half-mile on the other side of the end of the world there's a resort where they cure alcoholic orgiasms. . . .

ACTOR. [*Poking his head from the top of the oven.*] Orga-ni-sms, you fool!

SATIN. Orgiasms, poisoned with alcohol. . . .

ACTOR. Yes! He—will go! He will go . . . you will see!

BARON. Who is—he, monsieur?

ACTOR. I!

BARON. Merci, servant of the goddess . . . whosis? The goddess of the drama, the goddess of tragedy . . . what was her name?

ACTOR. The muse, ignoramous! Not goddess, but—muse!

SATIN. Lachesis . . . Hera . . . Aphrodite . . . Atropos. . . . To hell with them. . . . It's all the old man's doings . . . he made the screws wobble in this fellow's head . . . Did you know it, baron?

BARON. The old man was full of hot crickets. . . .

ACTOR. Imbeciles! Morons! Mel-pom-e-ne! Men without hearts! You will see—he will go! "Gorge yourself,

melancholy thoughts . . ." poem by Beranger . . . yes! He—will find for himself a place . . . where there's no . . . where there's no . . .

BARON. Where there is nothing, monsieur?

ACTOR. Yes! Nothing! "This hole will be my grave, no doubt. . . . I'm dying—weak and all tired out!" Why are you living? Why?

BARON. Hey, you! Edmund Kean, genius and madman! Don't yell!

ACTOR. To hell with you! I will yell!

NASTYA. [*Raises her head from the table and waves her arms.*] Go on, holler! Make them listen!

BARON. Bright idea, mademoiselle!

SATIN. Let them alone, baron! To hell with them! Let them yell; Let them break their necks . . . let them! That's a thought! Let people alone, as old graybeard used to say . . . I tell you, it was he, that old skeeziks, who soured our whole menagerie. . . .

ANDREI. He kidded them all into going somewhere—but he didn't tell 'em how to get there. . . .

BARON. The old fellow was a charlatan.

NASTYA. You lie! You are a charlatan yourself!

BARON. Tut, tut! Mademoiselle!

ANDREI. He didn't have much use for the truth, the old fellow. . . . He always argued against the truth . . . and he *should* have. I ask you—what sort of thing is the truth? Even without it there is no chance to breathe

. . . take the prince—he smashed his hand on his job . . . he'll have to have his hand sliced off—get me? That's truth for you!

SATIN. [*Banging his fist on table.*] Shut up, all of you! You are all a bunch of cattle! You—wooden-heads! Shut up about the old man! [*More calmly.*] You, baron, are the worst of the lot! You don't understand anything and you lie like hell! The old fellow was not a charlatan! What is truth? Man—that's truth! He understood that . . . you don't! You have no more brains than a potato! I understand the old man . . . I do! He lied . . . but he did it out of pity for you, you damned fools! There are lots of people who lie out of pity for their neighbors . . . I know! I—read it in books! They lie beautifully, joyfully! There are lies that are comforting, lies that bring peace . . . only a lie can lighten the load of the worker who crushes his hand, and of those doomed to die of hunger. . . . I know all about lies! Those who are slaves at heart . . . and those who can live only on the strength of others—they both must have lies—some of them use lies as crutches, others—to hide behind them. But he—who is his own master, who is independent, and does not sponge on others, what does he need lies for? The lie—is the religion of slaves and slave-drivers. . . . Truth is the God of the free!

BARON. Bravo! Beautifully said! I—agree in everything! You speak . . . like a gentleman!

SATIN. Why shouldn't a crook speak sometimes like a gentleman, as long as gentlemen so often speak like crooks? It's true, I've forgotten a lot, but I still remem-

ber a thing or two! The old man, he was a wise old owl! He acted on me like acid on an old, rusty coin. . . . Let's drink to him! Fill 'em up!

[NASTYA *fills a glass with beer and hands it to* SATIN.]

BARON. Yes, yes! Let's drink!

SATIN. The old man lives from inside himself . . . he looks at everything with his own eyes. Once I asked him: "Granny! What do people live for?" [*He tries to talk with the voice of* LUKA *and imitating his mannerisms.*] "Ah—people live for the better, my dear fellow! Here, let us say, there are carpenters in the world, and all sorts of other people, trash and otherwise, and here they give birth to a carpenter . . . such a carpenter, the earth never saw anything like him; he is way above all the others and you can't find his equal among carpenters. What happens? He puts his mark on everything in the line of carpentry . . . and all at once the trade moves up twenty years ahead . . . and so with all the others . . . locksmiths, and shoemakers, and the rest of working-men . . . and all the peasants, too . . . and even the people on top—they all live to bring forth the better. Each one thinks he is living for himself alone, and it turns out he is living for the betterment of all! A hundred years from now . . . ah, maybe, they'll live even more 'for the better man that is to come'! [NASTYA *stands staring intently in* SATIN'S *face.* ANDREI *stops working on the accordion and also listens. The* BARON, *sinking his head low, beats a tattoo on the table with his fingers. The* ACTOR, *protruding himself from the oven, is trying to climb on his bunk without making a*

noise. SATIN *still imitating* LUKA.] All, my dear fellow, every man born lives to bring forth the better. That's why we must value every man . . . for you don't know who he is, why he was born, and what he can do. Who knows? Maybe he was born to bring us fortune . . . for the great good of all of us. Above all we must value the children—the little children. Little children—must be given room to live in. . . . Don't meddle in children's lives. . . . Value the children!"

[*A pause.*]

BARON. [*Meditatively.*] Mm . . . yes . . . for the better? That reminds me of my family . . . an old family . . . dating back to Catherine . . . gentlemen . . . soldiers . . . came from France . . . they served, rose always higher. . . . Under Nicholas I my grandfather, Gustave De Bille, occupied a high post . . . wealth . . . hundreds of serfs . . . horses . . . cooks . . .

NASTYA. You lie! There were no such things!

BARON. [*Jumping up.*] Wha-at? W-well . . . yes, yes, go on?!

NASTYA. There were no such things!

BARON. [*Shouting.*] A house in Moscow! A house in Petrograd! Carriages . . . carriages with coats of arms!

[ANDREI *picks up the accordion and goes to a corner, from where he is observing the scene.*]

NASTYA. No such things!

BARON. Hush! I am telling you . . . scores of lackeys!

ACT IV

Satin: ". . . every man born lives to bring forth the better!" (p. 118)

NASTYA. [*With delight.*] N-no such things!

BARON. I'll kill you!

NASTYA. [*Getting ready to run.*] There were no carriages!

SATIN. Stop it, darling, don't get him started!

BARON. Wait . . . you, trash! My grandfather . . .

NASTYA. There was no grandfather! There was nothing!

[SATIN *roars with laughter.*]

BARON. [*Exhausted with rage he sits down on the bench.*] Satin, you tell this trollop . . . what? You—are laughing, too? You, too—don't believe me? [*He yells in despair, banging his fists on the table.*] These things *were,* God damn you!

NASTYA. [*Triumphantly.*] Ha-ha! so you are crying? Now you know what it feels like not to be believed?

ANDREI. [*Coming back to the table.*] I thought there was gonna be a brawl. . . .

TATAR. A-ah, foolish peoples! Very bad!

BARON. I—cannot allow anyone to make fun of me! I have proofs . . . documents, damn you!

SATIN. Forget them! And forget the carriages of your grandfather . . . you'll never get anywhere in the carriages of your grandfather!

BARON. But how dare she, though!

NASTYA. I am a-asking you! How dare I?

SATIN. You see, she does dare! How is she worse than you? Although in her past, there certainly were not only no carriages and no—grandfathers, but not even a father and mother. . . .

BARON. [*Calming down.*] Devil take you . . . you—can reason things out calmly. . . . But I, it seems, have no character. . . .

SATIN. [*Pouring vodka in his glass.*] Get some. It comes in handy. . . . [*A pause.*] Nastya! Are you going to the hospital?

NASTYA. What for?

SATIN. To see Natasha?

NASTYA. He just wakes up! She left the hospital long ago. She left and just disappeared. They can't find a trace of her anywhere. . . . She's gone!

SATIN. She's a goner. . . .

ANDREI. It'll be interesting to know which puts it over on the other—Vaska on Vasilisa, or she on him?

NASTYA. Vasilisa will get out of it! She is—a smart one. And Vaska will crack rocks in Siberia. . . .

SATIN. For killing in a brawl you only go to jail.

NASTYA. Too bad. Breaking rocks would have been better. . . . You should all be splitting rocks . . . they should sweep you up like garbage . . . somewhere in a gutter!

SATIN. [*Surprised.*] What bit you? Have you gone cuckoo?

BARON. I am going to smack her one—for getting so fresh! . . .

NASTYA. Go ahead and try it! You just dare touch me!

BARON. I'll try all right!

SATIN. Let her alone! Don't touch her . . . don't hurt a human being! I can't get him out of my head—that old fellow! [*He laughs.*] Don't hurt a human being! And if I have been hurt once and—it keeps hurting all my life! What should I do then? Forgive? Never!

BARON. [*To* NASTYA.] You must understand that I—am not your kind! You . . . nasty thing!

NASTYA. Ah, you poor unfortunate! Why, you live off me like a worm off an apple!

[*A good-natured burst of laughter from the men.*]

ANDREI. Ah, just look at the apple, will you!

BARON. You *can't* get mad at her—she's just an idiot!

NASTYA. You are laughing, eh? You are hypocrites—you don't feel at all like laughing!

ACTOR. [*Somberly.*] Give it to them!

NASTYA. If I only could—I would . . . [*Takes a cup from the table and smashes it on floor.*] do that with you.

TATAR. For why break dish? Ah . . . you fool girl!

BARON. [*Getting up.*] Leave it to me. I am going to teach her manners!

NASTYA. [*Running away.*] You go to hell!

SATIN. [*Running after her.*] Hey! Enough of that! Whom are you trying to frighten? What's all this about, anyway?

NASTYA. Wolves! May you all drop dead! Wolves!

[*Runs out slamming door.* BARON *runs out after her.*]

ACTOR. [*Somberly.*] Amen!

TATAR. Oo oo! Russian woman—bad woman—fresh—wild! Tatar girl—no! Tatar girl—she obey law!

ANDREI. What she needs is a good beating.

BARON. [*Comes back nursing a bitten finger.*] B-bitch!

ANDREI. [*Testing the accordion.*] All fixed. Now if Alyoshka would only show up for it. . . . He is just burning himself up, that kid.

SATIN. Now—have a snort?

ANDREI. Thanks. Just a nip before I hit the hay.

SATIN. Getting used to us?

ANDREI. [*Drinks up, then goes in the corner to his bunk.*] It's all right. . . . All people are—human. . . . At first—you don't see it . . . after a while—you look around, and it turns out all are—human . . . it's all right!

[*The* TATAR *spreads something on his bunk, sinks on his knees and begins singing a haunting oriental prayer.*]

BARON. [*Calling* SATIN'S *attention to the* TATAR.] Look!

SATIN. Let him alone! He is a good boy . . . don't bother him! [*Laughing heartily.*] I am terribly good today . . . Christ knows why. . . .

BARON. You are always good when you guzzle . . . and you make a lot of sense. . . .

SATIN. When I am plastered I like everything. M'yes. . . . He is praying! That's fine! A man can believe or not believe—that's his business. A man—is free . . . he pays himself for everything: for believing, for not believing, for loving, for thinking, a man pays for everything himself; and that's why—he is free! . . . Man—*he* is the truth. What is man? He is not you, not I, not they . . . no! He is you, I, they, the old man, Napoleon, Mohammed—all in one! [*He outlines in the air with his finger the figure of a man.*] Do you understand? That's—tremendous. In that are—all beginnings and all endings. All—*in* man, all—*for* man. Man alone exists, everything else—is the work of his hand and his brain. Ma-an! That is—magnificent! There's such pride in the word! Ma-a-an! You must value man! Not pity him . . . not lower him with pity . . . you must value him! Let's drink to man, baron!

BARON. Yes, yes! Let's drink!

SATIN. [*He stands up.*] It's good—to feel one's self a man! I—a jail-bird, a murderer, a crook—*yes, sir!*

When I walk on the street people treat me as a thug . . . they shun me and glare at me . . . and often they call me a son of a bitch! "Go to work, you bum!" Work? What for? To get a full belly? [*He laughs.*] I have always despised people whose only care in the world was a full belly. That's not the thing, baron! That's not the thing! Man—is above that! Man is—above a full belly!

BARON. [*Nodding his head.*] You can reason—that's a good thing . . . that, I guess, must be a comfort . . . I can't do it . . . I don't know how! [*Looks around, then—in low, guarded tone.*] I, brother, am afraid . . . at times. . . . Do you understand? I'm scared . . . of things yet to go on!

SATIN. [*Going away from him.*] Nonsense! What is a man to be afraid of?

BARON. You know . . . ever since I can remember my brain has been in some sort of a fog. I have never been able to understand a thing. It seems to me that all my life I have done nothing but change clothes . . . but what for? I'll be damned if I know. . . . I went to school—I wore the uniform of the Nobles' Institute. . . . But what have I studied? I'll be damned if I remember. . . . I got married—I put on a frock-coat, then a dressing-gown . . . but the woman I married was a shrew, and—why? I'll be damned if *I* know. I squandered everything I had . . . wore some kind of gray jacket and red pants . . . but how I frittered it all away. . . . I'll be damned if I noticed. . . . I had a government position . . . wore a uniform, a swanky cap and a cockade . . . dissipated government funds

. . . and they dolled me all up in a striped suit . . . after that—I got myself dolled up in these rags. . . . And all of it—like in a dream . . . huh? That's —funny. . . .

SATIN. Not very. . . . It's rather—silly.

BARON. Yes . . . I, too, think it's silly. But then—I must have been born for something, huh?

SATIN. [*Laughing.*] True enough. . . . Man is born to bring forth something better! [*Nodding his head.*] That's—a good one!

BARON. This—Nastya! . . . She ran out . . . I wonder where to? I'll go look . . . where is she? After all . . . she . . . [*He goes out. A pause. The* TATAR *is still singing.*]

ACTOR. Tatar. [*A pause.*] Prince! [TATAR *turns around.*] Pray for . . . me.

TATAR. What?

ACTOR. [*Lower.*] Pray for . . . me!

TATAR. [*After a silence.*] Pray for yourself. . . . [*Resumes his chant.*]

ACTOR. [*Quickly climbs down from the oven, goes to the table, pours himself a glass of whiskey with a trembling hand, gulps it down and goes to the hall on a half-run.*] He went!

SATIN. Hey, you orgiasm, he went where? [*He whistles.*]

[*Enter* ABRAMKA, *in a padded woman's jacket, and* BUBNOV. *Both have been drinking. In one hand* BUBNOV *carries a string of large, hard doughnuts (cracknells) and in the other several smoked flounders. One bottle of vodka is under his arm and another in his coat pocket.*]

ABRAMKA. A camel—he is something like an ass! Only he has no ears. . . .

BUBNOV. Forget it! You yourself are something like an ass.

ABRAMKA. A camel has no ears at all. . . . He listens with his nose. . . .

BUBNOV. [*To* SATIN.] My friend! I looked for you all over in every bar-room. Take one of these bottles, I got my hands full.

SATIN. Well—put the doughnuts on the table, that will free one hand.

BUBNOV. That's right, too. Oh, you! . . . Baboon, look! Ain't he smart, huh? Smart as hell!

ABRAMKA. Crooks are all smart. I know it! They couldn't get along without brains. A good man—he can be good and brainless; but a bad man—he must have brains. But you are all wrong about camels—they are *riding* animals . . . ain't got no horns . . . ain't got no teeth. . . .

BUBNOV. Where's the gang? Why is nobody here? Hey there, wiggle down! I am treating the crowd! Who's that in the corner?

SATIN. Are you bound to booze up everything quick? Nit-wit!

BUBNOV. Damn quick! My capital this time is the size of a pea. . . . Grizzly! Where in hell is Grizzly?

ANDREI. [*Coming up to the table.*] He is not here.

BUBNOV. Gr-rrr. . . . Sic 'em tige! Brrew, brlew, brlew! Turkey-cock! Don't bark, don't growl! Drink, laugh, keep your tail wagging, and not dragging. . . . I'm treating everybody! I, brother, just love to treat. If I was rich I'd build free saloons for everybody. You are damn right, I would! With music, and I'd insist on a chorus of fine singers. . . . "Come on over, everybody, drink, eat, listen to the songs, make your hearts glad. . . . Are you broke, buddy? Hop over to my free saloon." Satin, old top, to you I would say: "Here—take half of all my capitals!" That's what!

SATIN. You better give me *all* your capitals right now. . . .

BUBNOV. All my capitals? Right now? All right! Here's a—rouble. Here's some more . . . twenty kopeks . . . five kopeks . . . seeds . . . that's all!

SATIN. That's fine! It'll be safer with me! I am gonna gamble with it. . . .

ABRAMKA. I am a witness. He gave you the money to save for him. . . . How much is it?

BUBNOV. Ah, g'wan you. You are a camel. We don't need no witnesses.

ALYOSHKA. [*Comes in barefooted.*] Menagerie! I got my feet wet!

BUBNOV. Come on, wet your gullet. That's the only thing to do! You are a good kid . . . you sing and you play —that's very good. But you mustn't booze! That, brother, ain't no good. . . . Boozing—ain't no good!

ALYOSHKA. I have only to look at you! The only time you are half human is when you are all tanked up! Andrei—did you fix my accordion? [*He sings and dances.*]

"If I ain't been such a cutie
My mug without no beauty,
My darling sweet patootie
Would not be sweet on me!"

I am frozen, brothers! Brrr-rr . . . I am c-cold!

ABRAMKA. M'm . . . and may I ask: just what is a sweet patootie?

BUBNOV. Oh, tush! Now, brother, you are just—choo-choo! You ain't no longer a cop . . . feeneesh! No longer a cop, and no longer even an uncle. . . .

ALYOSHKA. Only auntie's hubbie—that's all!

BUBNOV. One niece of yours is in jail; the other—is dying. . . .

ABRAMKA. [*Proudly.*] You lie! She is not dying; I just lost her without a trace!

[SATIN *laughs loudly.*]

BUBNOV. That makes no difference, brother! A man without a niece is no uncle!

ALYOSHKA. Your Excellency! Here comes the drummer of the retired nanny-goats!

Oh, my broad has lots of money
All I got is beloney—
That's why I am such a honey—
A candy kid am I!—

Br-rrr. It's cold!

[*Enter* GRIZZLY: *from now on—until the end of the act—there keep drifting in several other figures, men and women. They undress, flop on the bunks, grumble.*]

GRIZZLY. Hey, Bubnov, why did you run away for?

BUBNOV. Come over here! Sit down . . . let's sing, brother! Our favorite song . . . eh?

TATAR. Night—for sleep! Daytime—for song!

SATIN. Oh, that's nothing, prince! You—join us!

TATAR. How, nothing? He make noise . . . when he sing song—he make noise. . . .

BUBNOV. [*Walks over to* TATAR.] Prince! How is—the hand? Did they cut it off for you?

TATAR. For why? Me wait . . . maybe—no need cut off . . . hand no iron . . . no take long time to cut off. . . .

GRIZZLY. Look out for yourself, Hassanka! Without hands you are no good for nothing! We, brother, are

not worth a damn without our hands and backs. No hands—no more man. Put tobacco on it! Come drink vodka! Ain't nothing else to do!

KVASHNYA. [*Coming in.*] Ah, my dears, it's simply terrible outdoors! Simply terrible! Cold and slushy. Is my soldier-boy here? Hey, general!

ABRAMKA. [*Meekly.*] Here I am!

KVASHNYA. Are you running around in my shirt-waist again? And you look a bit pickled, what? How d'ye get that way?

ABRAMKA. It happens to be Bubnov's name day—and cold and—slushy!

KVASHNYA. Look out or I'll slush you! Cut the comedy! Go to bed!

ABRAMKA. [*Goes to the kitchen.*] I could sleep all right. I want to . . . it's time!

SATIN. Why are you so strict with him?

KVASHNYA. That's the only way to be with him, my dear. You must be strict with a husband like him. I married him because I thought he'd be some help to me, he being a military man—and you such a wild lot. . . . I'm after all only a woman. And now he goes and boozes! That's no good to me.

SATIN. You've picked yourself a fine helper. . . .

KVASHNYA. There was no better one around. *You* don't want to live with me! You are so stuck up! And even if you was to start living with me 'twouldn't last a week.

And you would gamble me and my whole shebang away. . . .

SATIN. [*Laughing.*] That's right, landlady . . . I would. . . .

KVASHNYA. That's it. Alyoshka!

ALYOSHKA. Here he is—the boy himself!

KVASHNYA. You—what have you been blabbing about me?

ALYOSHKA. Who, me? Everything; everything I could think of. Here, I said, is a woman for you! Marvellous! Meat, fat, bones—four hundred pounds, but brains she has nix!

KVASHNYA. Well, that's a big lie! I have lots of brains, too. Now, why do you go around saying that I beat my soldier-boy?

ALYOSHKA. I thought you was giving him a beating when I saw you drag him by his whiskers. . . .

KVASHNYA. [*Laughing.*] Idiot! Make believe you didn't see. Why carry dirt outside the house? And besides, you have hurt him . . . because of your blabbing he has taken to drink. . . .

ALYOSHKA. It's true, then, that even a hen drinks!

[SATIN *and* ANDREI *laugh.*]

KVASHNYA. Oo, you sneering devil! What kind of a man are you, Alyoshka?

ALYOSHKA. I am a swell guy. With both hands! What my eyes land on, I stand on!

BUBNOV. [*At the* TATAR*'s bunk.*] Come on! We won't let you sleep, anyway. We are gonna sing . . . all night long. Hey, Grizzly!

GRIZZLY. Sing? All right. . . .

ALYOSHKA. And I—will play!

SATIN. Come on, let her go!

TATAR. [*Smiling.*] Well, Satan, Bubna . . . you bring da vine . . . drink today, make song today, come death tomorrow, die tomorrow! . . .

BUBNOV. Give him a drink, Satin. Grizzly, sit down! Ah, brothers, does a man need much? Here I am—I had a few drinks and I am—happy. Grizzly, strike up our favorite. I will sing . . . I will cry!

GRIZZLY. [*Sings.*]

"The sun is rising and is setting.

BUBNOV. [*Joining in.*]

"But my prison sees no light!

[*The door opens quickly.*]

BARON. [*Stands on the threshold and shouts.*] Hey . . . you! Come . . . come quick! In the dump . . . out there . . . the actor . . . he has hanged himself!

[*Silence. All look at the* BARON; *behind him appears* NASTYA, *who slowly, opening wide her eyes, walks to the table.*]

SATIN. [*In an undertone.*] Ah, the damned fool . . . he spoiled the song!

CURTAIN

THE SUN IS RISING

(A RUSSIAN PRISON SONG)

Andante molto tranquillo
The sun is ris-ing and is set ting, But my pris-on sees no light
And the keep ers stand on guar d Ah ah ah ah
By my win-dow day and night, Guard all you want it does n't mat ter
I will not run a way that's plain. I long to get far far a
wa - - y. But ah, ah ah I can't break my hea vy chain.

NOTE: Set for the first time in English to the original Russian music, as used in the Second and Fourth Acts